

Roumen Daskalov

Debating the Past

Modern
Bulgarian
History

From
Stambolov
to
Zhivkov

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**Modern Bulgarian History:
From Stambolov to Zhivkov**

Roumen Daskalov



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Introduction

This book contains four historiographical studies, devoted to the most hotly debated issues of the history of Bulgaria from its liberation (1878) to the present that have engaged not only professional historians, but other scholars and the broader public as well. These are Stefan Stambolov's dictatorship, the rule of the Bulgarian Agrarian National Union under Aleksandŭr Stamboliiski, the problem of fascism (and the anti-fascist resistance), and the communist regime. These topics lead to wider issues traced in a long-term perspective. Thus the essay on Stambolov, centered on his "Russophobia" (anti-Russian policies) and his "dictatorship," provides a perspective on Bulgarian–Russian relations in general; the policies on the Bulgarian "national question" are traced in different contexts in all other studies. The work on the Bulgarian Agrarian National Union goes beyond the ideology and politics of peasant rule to trace the relations between Agrarians and communists in later times. The essay on fascism and the anti-fascist struggles actually covers the interpretation of Bulgaria's interwar and wartime political system. The work on the communist regime includes the debates on its various phases from "people's democracy" through the "personality cult" toward "advanced socialism" and, in addition to politics, some economic and cultural issues.

The entire modern political history of Bulgaria is thus spanned via its historiographical interpretations of major issues of contention. It is also probed in depth in the sense that every debated issue is traced from its initial posing in the "bourgeois" era through the early (Stalinist) socialism and the "revisions" of late socialism into the post-communist present, with an emphasis on the evolution of the views. A major issue not specifically tackled here (apart from the policies on the "national question") is the "Macedonian question." This is because there was hardly any debate between the national(ist) Bulgarian historians on the issue (except for the right policies); the debates were mostly with Macedonian, Yugoslav, and

Greek historiography, and presenting them would require another book. Also not tackled are historiographical debates in other “branches” of historical scholarship, such as economic, social, and cultural history. However, these never reached comparable intensity in history writing in Bulgaria, which was predominantly political.

The major debates in the modern history of Bulgaria were generated, fueled, and reactivated basically from three focal points: the geopolitical position of Bulgaria vis-à-vis Russia (the Soviet Union) and the West (Austria-Hungary, Germany, the European Union of today) and the influence or domination of these great powers; the “national question” (of the irredenta) set as a political priority and stubbornly pursued at all costs; and the struggles between the political Left and Right (and within the political Left) for a social order of a certain type. The historiographical debates in a sense replicated (in terms of preferences-biases and “values”) the struggles for one solution or another on the above problems in the historical reality itself. The abrupt changes in Bulgaria’s political system, accompanied by a reorientation of its foreign relations, were followed by “a new reading,” or more precisely a “new writing,” of history, that is, its radical reassessment with the discrediting of the “old regime” and the associated political forces and tendencies. If we leave aside the change from liberal democracy to authoritarianism in the interwar period and the short-lived German domination during World War II (which affected mostly the historiography of the national Revival and the Middle Ages), such a radical change happened with the establishment of the pro-Soviet communist regime on September 9, 1944, and with the “return” to liberal democracy and to Europe of the European Union after 1989. But a considerable evolution in the views on certain questions occurred during the communist regime itself, from the plain and militant “party truth” of the Stalinist period to a certain “normalization” of history writing under the banner of nationalism and statehood during “advanced socialism.”

The abrupt reassessments of the past left whole massifs of historical knowledge outdated and overturned what in a given moment had passed for the “objective truth” or the last word on a given problem. Just as the Stalinist writing of history became obsolete in subsequent decades, so a great part (though not all) of the historical knowledge produced until the fall of communism has been subject to radical revisions. It became useless, if not outright misleading. Given the deeply ideologized writing of history under communism, this seems inevitable. However, this “archeology of knowledge” (to borrow a term from Foucault) presents an interest from a historiographical point of view, and its study is quite instructive.

What for? And what is the kind of historiography, more precisely, the history of historiography practiced here?¹

Rather than simply making an inventory of the accumulated historical knowledge (what was written, on what problems, and by whom) in the version practiced here that I prefer to call “conceptual” historiography, the interest is directed toward general ideas, hypotheses, models, and theories, but also unstated assumptions, standpoints and value positions, and ways of representation (“pictures”) and narration (“plots” and “protagonists”).² Concentrating on certain pivotal issues, these essays present the ideas of various authors who wrote at different times, to some extent with a critical intention (“critique of ideas”), but mostly with the hermeneutic intention to compare them and trace the “movement of ideas” about the past. The author assumes the role of medium-“moderator” in presenting the various views and opinions, placing them in a dialogue with one another while his opinion is expressed somewhat indirectly. Juxtaposing and comparing historiographical constructs contributes to a more adequate picture of the past; in this sense the history of historiography is a kind of historiography itself, i.e., a study of the past. Blind alleys and rejected notions are no less interesting; in fact, they may be particularly revealing about the use of the past.

I would like to distance myself from the idea that the history of historiography amounts to some sort of “court of justice.” Just as history writing is not a Court of History judging the historical actors, the history of history writing is not a court trying historians. First of all, what matters here is ideas, not historians; secondly, it is not the task of historiography to judge, but to explain by taking the era and context into account. At the same time, I am in favor of a “critical” concept of (history of) historiography, not a “neutral,” colorless enumeration of what was written on a given

¹ All writing about the past is “historiography.” The study of historiography is called “history of historiography” by Petūr Bicilli and “archeology of historiography” by Michel de Certeau. See Petūr Bicilli, *Ochertsī vŭrkhu teoriyata na istoricheskata nauka* (Essays on the theory of historical science) (Sofia: Izdatelstvo na BAN, 1994), 214; Michel de Certeau, *The Writing of History*, trans. Tom Conley (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988) (first published as *L'écriture de l'histoire* [Editions Gallimard, 1975]). Michel de Certeau’s “archeology” has the function of describing deep structures of the historiographical discourse (unconscious for the historian), which limit the field of possible interpretations in relation not to the absent object of the past, but to the historiographical discourse itself.

² I have practiced similar historiography in Roumen Daskalov, *The Making of a Nation in the Balkans: Historiography of the Bulgarian Revival* (Budapest–New York: Central European University Press, 2004).

topic (as is the usual practice of historiography in Bulgaria). By “critical” I mean both in relation to the “facts” (i.e., the evidence) and by clarifying the inevitable value positions of the historians, including of the evaluator himself.

Furthermore, the history of historiography makes it possible to reveal connections between the knowledge of the past and its contemporary socio-political context, the conditioning of knowledge by socio-political forces and interests in particular, and the knowledge’s orientation toward (extra-scholarly) goals and values. The attention shifts from the adequacy (“truth content”) of the constructions of the past toward their relation to the time and conditions of their production. By situating it in its era, the (history of) historiography historicizes the knowledge of the past with an inevitably relativizing and—I believe—salutary (at least sobering) effect. The historiography of the socialist era presents a special case of direct politicization and ideologization of knowledge at the service to the political powers. I hope to have revealed just how the communist regime in Bulgaria tried to legitimize itself through history. But even under communism, especially as it liberalized, historiography was able to subvert official tenets and meanings, not least due to the power of language to displace meanings and shift perspectives, as I also hope to have demonstrated in the Bulgarian case. There is a “politics of history” in the post-communist period as well. But under general democratic conditions and with greater autonomy of scholarship, it is difficult to establish hegemony, even if supported by the government.

The juxtaposition (and confrontation) of ideas on a given issue and the demonstration of their evolution, as well as the contextualization of the knowledge of the past, at some point inevitably touch on the perennial historian’s question of “truth” and “objectivity.” I reserve these philosophical-methodological reflections for the conclusion. I present critically the ideas on objectivity and historical truth in Bulgarian historical scholarship, mostly from socialist and post-socialist times. I do not presume (as it would be more than naïve) to be able to offer some “solution” to questions on which scholars from various disciplines have conducted elaborate debates, and which, in fact, depend on deeper assumptions and in this sense allow for a variety of solutions. The contemporary postmodern postpositivist situation is characterized precisely by a lack of consensus and the existence of parallel notions of historical knowledge, between which it is possible to choose, ranging from some variant of positivism with a stricter concept of truth, through skeptical perspectivism, to radical postmodern relativism turned toward rhetorics and narrative techniques. The views of

some recognized authorities are noted only at the end to signal the present directions of inquiry and in trying to situate Bulgarian historiography, myself, and this enterprise.

Finally, why (a history of) historiography now? Dramatic changes in circumstances, such as the fall of communism, are a powerful impetus for reassessing the past and “history” as presented in historical writings. In such times the historian often acts as interpreter, problematizes received knowledge, and reflects on methods. The present work (I hope) does not support the familiar triumphalist “rewriting” of history from the point of view of the victor, which is not connected with intellectual efforts, doubts, or relativization. Not only is this historiography “of a second order” taking historiography as its object, but it also stresses the link of historical knowledge with the present and is perfectly aware that “history” does not stop here. I do not find very sympathetic the myth-busting often practiced in moments of abrupt change either, because it can hardly explain why the new truth is better, and not simply the substitution of one myth for another. For that reason the works of anti-communist “hard-liners” are treated on a par with the others, by disclosing their connection with the new situation.

The need (and urge) for reconsideration and reassessment of the historical knowledge and of the circumstances of its production in Bulgaria is strongly felt by many in the guild. This is attested to by numerous memoirs and interviews of historians published after 1989,³ as well as in essays on the status of historiography by Maria Todorova, Mito Isusov, Ivan Elenkov, Daniela Koleva, Antoaneta Zapryanova, Blagovest Nyagulov, Iliyana Marcheua, Snezhana Dimitrova, and others.⁴ The studies in this

³ *Istoritsite za istinata, za nasiliето, za sebe si. Sbornik s intervyyuta* (Historians on truth, coercion, and themselves. Collection of interviews) (Sofia: Universitetsko izdatelstvo “Sv. Kliment Okhridski,” 1994).

⁴ Maria Todorova, “Historiography of the Countries of Eastern Europe: Bulgaria,” *American Historical Review* 97, no. 4 (1992): 1105–1117; Mito Isusov, “Istoricheskata nauka i nashata süvremennost” (Historical science and our present), *Istoricheski pregled* 48, no. 1 (1991): 3–12; Daniela Koleva and Ivan Elenkov, “Did ‘The Change’ Happen? Post-socialist Historiography in Bulgaria,” in *(Re)Writing History in Southeast Europe after Socialism*, ed. Ulf Brunnbauer, 94–127 (Münster: Lit Verlag, 2004); Antoaneta Zapryanova, Blagovest Nyagulov, and Iliyana Marcheua, “Istoriografiyata mezhdu priemstvenost i promyana” (Historiography between continuity and change), *Istoricheski pregled* 61, no. 1–2 (2005): 3–97; Antoaneta Zapryanova, Blagovest Nyagulov, and Iliyana Marcheua, eds., *Istoricheskata nauka v Bülgariya. Süstoyanie i perspektivi* (Historical science in Bulgaria. State of affairs and perspectives) (Sofia: Institut po istoriya pri BAN, 2006); Snezhana Dimitrova, *Zhenite, istoriyata i nishto poveche. Predizvikatelstvata na*

book are written with the same interest in mind and conduct it in their own, more detailed way on particular issues.

The idea for this book was born during the discussions of the History Club—a small informal group of historians and other social scholars—at the Center of Advanced Study in Sofia. In this milieu of friendly and like-minded people, I presented the debate on fascism and continued with the “people’s democracy” until everything grew into a more comprehensive work on the great debates in Bulgarian historiography. I am grateful to those colleagues whose strong interest and pertinent remarks stimulated me and encouraged me to broaden the scope of the work. I am especially indebted to my father, a retired professor of history, who helped me with literature and competent remarks and, even more importantly, with appeals for “restraint,” “balance,” and “impartiality,” as well as with some productive disagreements. This is a reworked version of the book that appeared in Bulgarian in 2009. I would also like to express my gratitude to Chris Springer for editing the text to its present form.

refleksivnata istoriya (Women, history, and nothing else. The challenges of reflexive history) (Sofia: LIK, 2005); Iskra Baeva and Plamen Mitev, eds., *Predizvikelstvata na promianata* (The challenges of the change) (Sofia: Universitetsko izdatelstvo “Sv. Kliment Ohridski,” 2006). See also Wolfgang Höpken, “‘Kontinuität im Wandel’: Historiographie in Bulgarien seit der Wende,” *Österreichische Osthefte* 44, no. 1–2 (2002): 487–498.

CHAPTER 1

Stambolov, the Russophiles, and the Russophobes in Bulgaria

On July 6, 1995, a monument of Bulgarian statesman Stefan Stambolov—representing only his head with a deep cut on it—was inaugurated in the garden in front of the Army Club in Sofia, on the spot where he was murdered 100 years before. Insofar as Stambolov had become a symbol of independent national policies, directed against Russia in particular, the newly restored democracy in Bulgaria marked its exit from the Soviet sphere of influence with this monument. The irony is that by vindicating Stambolov, in fact, by giving official sanction to a process that had begun already under communism, it had to swallow up the dark side of his rule—his “dictatorship.”

This essay deals with the historiography of Stambolov’s rule and, more specifically, the issues that have given rise to animated and sometimes bitter controversies and various interpretations, as well as their evolution over time. In the foreign-policy domain, this refers to his confrontation with Russia in the drive toward independence that led to a break in diplomatic relations and also his policies regarding Macedonia (covering the period up to the wars). In domestic affairs, this refers to Stambolov’s dictatorship. Characteristics and assessments of Stambolov’s personality and his role in Bulgarian history will also be considered. While the focus is mostly on professional historiography, I will also refer to works of amateur historians, polemical works, memoirs, documentary fiction, and an occasional work of fiction (but not the contemporary press¹). This is be-

¹ On the press, see Boris Andreev, *Nachalo, razvoi i vŭzkhod na bŭlgarskiya pechat* (Beginnings, development, and rise of the Bulgarian press), vol. 2 (Sofia, 1948), 76–113. On the formation of a Bulgarian identity in the polemics between the Russophile and the Russophobe periodical press, see Stefan Dechev, “Dva proekta za bŭlgarska natsionalna identichnost ot kraya na XIX vek” (Two projects for a Bulgarian national identity from

cause my interest extends beyond the specialized treatment of Stambolov to his public “image” and function; besides, historians sometimes act as emotional and biased popularizers, especially on highly controversial issues, and in any case, scholarship filters into conventional wisdom.

The facts of Stambolov’s rule (the regency and his governments) are well researched and clarified in both their internal and international aspects. It suffices here to mark the chronology and the general course of the historical drama; additional data will be provided below, in the course of reviewing the historiography. The Bulgarians were liberated from Ottoman rule as a result of the Russo-Turkish War in 1877–1878. A small Bulgarian state was set up with Russian help north of the Balkan range and around Sofia under strong and undisputed Russian influence. The part of Bulgaria south of the Balkan range became an autonomous province of the Ottoman Empire called Eastern Rumelia, while Macedonia remained under Ottoman rule. After a few years the first Bulgarian prince, Alexander of Battenberg, seeking to rule autocratically, suspended the Tŭrnovo constitution with the consent of new Russian emperor Alexander III (who succeeded the liberal emperor-liberator Alexander II) and established what is known as the “regime of credentials” (April 27, 1881–September 6, 1883)—a kind of personal rule. Because of the strong resistance of the popular Liberal Party and the contradictions between the upholders of the regime (Conservatives and Russian generals), the prince had no choice but to restore the constitution and entrust the Liberals with the government. However, he lost the confidence of the Russian emperor, who suspected him of counteracting Russian influence. The Union of the Principality of Bulgaria with Eastern Rumelia (September 6/18, 1885) was carried out without Russian consent and provoked the negative reaction of Russia, but received the support of other great powers and was defended in the Serbo-Bulgarian War. The events polarized Bulgarian society into “Russophiles” (sympathizers with Russia) and “Russophobes” (opponents of Russia), who engaged in embittered strife. A group of Russophile officers conducted a coup d’état on August 9/22, 1886, and dethroned Prince Alexander, but a few days later a counter-coup d’état headed by Stambolov (as chairman of the National Assembly) managed to restore the prince. However, the prince chose to abdicate on the advice of the Russian emperor.

There ensued an unsettled and turbulent interregnum (*bezkniazhie*), when the country was ruled by a regency, headed de facto by Stambolov

the end of the nineteenth century), in *Balkanskiyat XIX vek. Drugi prochiti* (The Balkan nineteenth century. Other readings), ed. Diana Mishkova, 273–312 (Sofia: Riva, 2006).

(August 1886–August 2, 1887). The illegitimacy of the Bulgarian authorities from an international point of view (according to the 1878 Treaty of Berlin) meant there was a danger of foreign intervention, and increasing tension among the great powers further complicated the situation, known in European diplomatic history as “the Bulgarian crisis.” Russian interference in Bulgaria culminated with the mission of the Russian general Kaulbars (and Russian war ships in the port of Varna), followed by Bulgaria’s break in diplomatic relations with the liberator Russia (November 1886).

The nomination of Ferdinand of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha as a prince of Bulgaria (August 2, 1887) with the encouragement of Austria-Hungary and Great Britain calmed the situation, although he did not receive international recognition. Stambolov became premier (August 1887–May 1894) and suppressed, with a heavy hand, a number of conspiracies, attempted murders, and coup attempts inspired and financed by Russia with the goal of changing Bulgarian policies and restoring Russian influence. These included the “Russophile riots” of army officers in Russe and Silistra (February–March 1887), the activities of Captain Nabokov’s band (end of 1887), the plot by a group of officers led by Kosta Panitsa (beginning of 1890), the murder of Minister of Finance Hristo Belchev (March 15, 1891) (who was mistaken for Stambolov), and the murder of the Bulgarian diplomatic representative in Istanbul (Constantinople) Dr. Georgi Vulkovich (February 16, 1892). All these incidents were followed by Stambolov’s retribution against opponents, some of them innocent.

Stambolov achieved considerable foreign political successes, especially the soliciting from the sultan of permits for appointments of Bulgarian bishops in Ottoman Macedonia (first in the eparchies of Skopje and Ohrid, then in Veleš and Nevrokop), as well as a breach in the so-called “capitulations” (unfavorable trade treaties with the great powers, inherited from the Ottoman Empire) by concluding new bilateral trade agreements with some states. In internal affairs he worked to modernize communications (by building up railways and roads), the economy (by encouraging local industries), and education (by passing a good education law and founding a national university). As the external danger gradually subsided, Stambolov’s “dictatorship” became increasingly oppressive and unbearable, and the opposition grew, including a legal (i.e., permitted) opposition from his former associates. At the same time Prince Ferdinand’s position was strengthened by his marriage and the birth of an heir to the throne (Stambolov then eliminated the constitutional requirement that the heir be of the Orthodox faith). Correctly judging the change in the

international situation and after securing the support of the army, Ferdinand got rid of Stambolov by accepting his resignation on May 18, 1894, and appointed a new premier, Konstantin Stoilov. After Stambolov stepped down from power, his life was in constant danger, but he was denied a passport to leave the country. About one year later, on July 3, 1895, he was savagely attacked and died of his wounds two days later. Relations with Russia were restored by Stoilov during the reign of the new Russian emperor Nicholas II with the act of baptizing the Bulgarian heir to the throne in Orthodoxy (February 2, 1896), and thereafter followed Ferdinand's recognition by the other great powers.

Initial Interpretations of the Stambolov Era

The interpretation of Stambolov and his times began in the era before the Balkan Wars and World War I. Among the earlier, mostly polemical, works, those of the socialists deserve special attention, not least with regard to later historiography. In his polemical pamphlet *Our Apostles* (1886), the founder of Bulgarian socialism Dimitŭr Blagoev touches upon, among other issues, relations with Russia and Austria-Hungary. Taking issue with Zakhari Stoyanov (a national revolutionary and writer, and a close friend of Stambolov), Blagoev declared himself against extreme Russophobia and in favor of a more moderate, though critical, attitude towards Russia. The reasoning was purely pragmatic: Russia was not about to give up striving for influence in Bulgaria and in the Balkans and would play a major role (eventually in alliance with France) in the struggle against Austro-German Europe. Bulgaria's choice, therefore, was not between Europe and Russia, but between Austro-German Europe and Slavic-Romanic Europe. Blagoev pointed to the dependence of Serbia on Austria and opted to seek the protection of Russia; in his opinion in other (though utopian) circumstances this would even be "natural."²

In the 1890s the socialists took a firm Russophobe stand, largely under the influence of Friedrich Engels's 1890 article "The Foreign Policy of Russian Tsarism" (published in the Russian journal *Social Democrat* in London and translated into Bulgarian in 1895). In this work Engels de-

² Dimitŭr Blagoev, "Nashite apostoli" (Our apostles), in Dimitŭr Blagoev, *Sŭchineniya* (Works), vol. 1 (Sofia: Izdatelstvo na BKP, 1957; first published 1887), 205–280, esp. 266–269, 273–279.

nounced Russian tsarism as the main prop of European reaction and suppressor of the national-liberation movements in Europe.³ In fact, the anti-tsarist position was only natural for the Bulgarian socialists, who were under the influence of the Russian “nihilists” (i.e., social revolutionaries) and of the Marxists (Blagoev himself started his socialist career in Russia). But their Russophobia would cause inconvenience and a need for reinterpretation after World War II.

The socialist Krüstyū Rakovski (who had a great career after the October Revolution until he was murdered in a Stalinist prison in 1937) takes a strongly anti-Russian position in his well-argued book *Russia in the East* (1898). The major ideas in this book are that tsarist Russia’s intentions and goals in the Balkans were aggressive and were not realized thanks to the antagonism between Russia and the other great powers, which saved Bulgaria. This antagonism made Russia agree to substitutes for a territorial conquest, initially to protect the Christian peoples under Ottoman rule and later on the creation of small Balkan “independent” states under Russian influence. Russia harmed the interests of the Balkan peoples in various ways, including devastating lands and abducting the population into Russian territory after every war with Turkey, as well as occupying Romania. It is true that Russia acted to liberate most of the Balkan peoples (most of all the Bulgarians), but this was done for its own purposes in its drive toward Constantinople (Istanbul). It was precisely the rivalry with Russia that prompted the other great powers to partition the Bulgarian lands after the Russo-Turkish War of 1877–1878, in the belief that they were truncating a future Russian province. Russia sought the strongest possible influence in Bulgaria, as shown by its disregard for Prince Alexander of Battenberg and the provoking of unrest after his deposition in order to justify a “pacifying” Russian intervention (not allowed by Europe). Russia also incited the Balkan states against one another, so that they would ask for its assistance and remain under its influence. Rakovski believed that Russia’s drive towards the Straits and Istanbul was the main external danger for Bulgaria, a threat to its very existence, and accordingly advised that Bulgaria align itself with Russia’s enemies and initiate

³ The Bulgarian translation: Friedrich Engels, *Vünshnata politika na ruskoto tsarstvo* (The foreign policy of Russian tsarism) (Kazanlūk, 1895). On the anti-Russian stance of the Bulgarian socialists from this era, see Veselin Hadzhinikolov, “Otnosheniyata mezhdu Bŭlgariya i Rusiya v istoricheskata literatura u nas do Oktomvriiskata revolyutsiya” (Relations between Bulgaria and Russia in Bulgarian historiography until the October Revolution), *Izvestiya na Bŭlgarskoto istorichesko druzhestvo*, vol. 25 (1967): 345–370, esp. 364–370.

a defensive alliance among the Balkan states.⁴ At the same time Rakovski differentiated clearly between the “official Russia” of the tsarist autocracy and the Russian people oppressed by it, as well as the Russian democrats. He wished the latter success in the struggle to establish a constitutional and democratic Russia, of whom Bulgaria would not be afraid.⁵ The same differentiation was made later, but with another intention, namely to exonerate Russian official policies along with Bulgarians’ positive feelings toward the Russian people.

In his *A Contribution to the History of Socialism in Bulgaria* (1906), Dimitŭr Blagoev describes and interprets events in a strongly pro-Stambolovist and Russophobe manner. The union of the Principality of Bulgaria with Eastern Rumelia (1885) interfered with Russia and Austria’s aggressive plans in the Balkans, and the two powers incited Serbia to attack Bulgaria. The Russophiles, namely the followers of Dragan Tsankov in Northern Bulgaria and the (pseudo-)unionists in Southern Bulgaria (Eastern Rumelia), were “blind instruments of Russian policy” in Bulgaria and in the Balkans. After the coup d’état of the army officers and the counter-coup d’état, the “struggle for national independence” began under Stambolov. Attempts at reconciliation were rejected by Russia, which wanted to turn Bulgaria into a “Russian province” and sent a Russian general (Kaulbars) to provoke disorder and topple the regency. Russia’s efforts to subjugate Bulgaria caused a division into two irreconcilably hostile camps—“the black souls” and “traitors” (i.e., the Russophiles, including the followers of Petko Karavelov) and the “patriots” (i.e., the Russophobes, which included most of the intelligentsia). Russia threatened Bulgaria with occupation, and in response all across Bulgaria a network of patriotic organizations arose called “Bulgaria for Herself,” characterized by Blagoev as a “kind of people’s militia for the defense of the Fatherland from the traitors.” Thus the struggle of the Russophobes against the Russophiles “actually became a struggle for defense of national independence from the encroachments of Russia and of its friends within the country,” who acted “through military conspiracies, armed bands, and assassinations, arranged with Russian gold.” The struggle for

⁴ Krŭstyū Rakovski, *Rusiya na Iztok. Istoricheskŭ izsledvane na ruskata politika na Iztok i chastno v Bŭlgariya* (Russia in the East. A historical study of the Russian policies in the East and in Bulgaria in particular) (reprint, Sofia: Globus 91, 1994; first published 1898), esp. 8, 82, 120–121, 145–147, 154–155, 178–181, 230–231, 242–245, 252–253. Krŭstyū Rakovski was a socialist, the nephew of the prominent Bulgarian national (anti-Ottoman) revolutionary Georgi S. Rakovski, and played an important role in the Russian Revolution.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 9, 253.

national independence continued from 1886 to 1892, when a struggle against the “so-called” (placed in quotes by Blagoev) Stambolovist regime began, which turned into a “general movement” supported by all political groups and by the court and led to his downfall.⁶

Blagoev introduced the economic approach and characterized the parties in terms of class: the Russophile pseudo-unionists in Southern Bulgaria (Eastern Rumelia) and the followers of Dragan Tsankov in Northern Bulgaria (Principality of Bulgaria) were representatives of the emerging new money-lender/merchant class and the well-to-do layers of the peasants and artisans; the Union itself created a “bigger national unit” with better conditions for capitalist development and greater political weight in the Balkans. Stambolov’s regime saw the increased concentration of merchant and money-lending capital and land ownership; the first state loans were concluded, which were spent on armaments and construction projects, enriching politicians and entrepreneurs.

The review of Stambolov’s regime and Bulgarian-Russian relations in a work on the Bulgarian constitution by the prominent Russian jurist Pavel Milyukov deserves special treatment.⁷ Milyukov’s work is distinguished not only by its erudition but also by sociological acumen, absence of idealization, clarity, and neutral analysis from the position of a comparatively disinterested observer. He states that the cooling of relations with Russia dated back to the “regime of credentials” (1881–1883), describes the “parties” that were formed on the issue of the Union, and notes the tendency “to make use of Russia” in inter-party disputes. He explains Russia’s policies against the Union purely pragmatically—Russia wanted a strong and united Bulgaria only as long as it had an unrestricted influence upon Bulgaria’s foreign policy and army. Then he describes the transformation of the brave and determined Stambolov into a “revolutionary dictator” (a “Bulgarian Robespierre”) in the extraordinary circumstances after the counter-coup d’état. In Milyukov’s opinion, given the insecure international situation and the habit in Bulgaria of looking abroad for help, Stambolov cannot be blamed for resorting to violence. Milyukov notes the degeneration of the patriotic bands of “Bulgaria for Herself” into armed gangs relying upon the patronage of the government. From the two parts of the slogan “independence and freedom for Bulgaria,” Stambolov

⁶ Dimităr Blagoev, *Prinos kŭm istoriyata na sotsializma v Bŭlgariya* (A contribution to the history of socialism in Bulgaria) (Sofia, 1906), 74–80.

⁷ Pavel Milyukov, *Bŭlgarskata konstitutsiya* (The Bulgarian constitution) (Solun, 1905), esp. 69–101.

sacrificed freedom in the name of independence. Once the international situation stabilized, the “other side of the coin” came to the fore, namely, Stambolov’s repressions, and the opposition grew in strength. Then came the conflict with Prince Ferdinand, who took control of the army while Stambolov controlled the police, followed by Stambolov’s fall, which opened the way for the “personal regime” of Ferdinand. The irony is that in stabilizing Ferdinand, Stambolov made himself dispensable, and changing the constitution regarding the heir even gave him a “trump for future bargaining with Russian diplomats” (i.e., for baptizing the heir into Orthodoxy and reconciliation with Russia).

Stambolov’s rule and dictatorship are depicted firsthand by contemporaries in memoirs about him and his times (published much later), along with impressions of his personality. The memoirs sometimes confuse dates, names, and places, and pass on hearsay and gossip, but they present an authentic picture of the era, the way of thinking, the opinions, and the talk of the day. Rather than being a weakness, their strong subjectivity and biases are an advantage, because they provide various viewpoints, put historical actors and events in an unexpected context, and throw additional light (and shadow) over them.⁸ It happens that the researcher makes a guess or receives an insight precisely from memoirs, and a number of the scholarly interpretations and “hypotheses” derive from here (although the memoirs are not credited). In general the meaning that contemporaries find in their era remains the basis upon which historians later build, adding a broader context and “wisdom” with hindsight. In fact, historians sometimes do little but supplement and complete, and sometimes correct, the picture with documents inaccessible to contemporaries and to support one “primary” interpretation against another with the additional evidence.

Without dealing with the memoirs at length, I would like to note a few characteristic features of the perspective and interpretation. The persecuted Russophiles highlight the crude and despotic nature of the regime, which they experienced firsthand. From their point of view, the unsettled international situation and the lack of recognition from the great powers made the government illegal and the prince self-appointed. The fight for independence against Russia was a farce and a pretext for usurping power and using it for personal gain. People of great virtue and public merit, including higher

⁸ This understanding and high regard for the memoirs appears in Stoicho Grüncharov, *Politicheskite sili i monarkhicheskiyat institut v Bŭlgariya 1886–1894* (The political forces and the institution of the monarchy in Bulgaria, 1886–1894) (Sofia: Nauka i izkustvo, 1984), 9–10.

clergy, were persecuted and tortured in the police stations and prisons. The whole administrative and police apparatus and numerous secret agents and spies were mobilized in support of the dictatorial regime and acted in a lawless and arbitrary manner, creating an atmosphere of suspicion and fear. The press was severely censored.⁹ The ideological and political struggles degenerated at the local level into bloody partisan clashes between gangs from different neighborhoods, as well as the misuse of local authority for settling accounts with rivals and for personal gain.¹⁰ This situation forced many opponents of the regime to leave the country, and they acted from abroad, even appealing to foreign states (Russia, Turkey) to intervene. The picture is of a regime radically contested in its legitimacy.

According to some observations, the duration of Stambolov's regime itself (seven years) contributed to the growing hatred toward it. It outlived its initial justification of an external danger, the reference to which lost credibility while the dictatorship pressed more heavily on the population and the desire to replace the rulers, regardless of who succeeded them, increased. The violence of the regime left a great number of violated and embittered people who craved revenge, and a new generation came of age who yearned for freedom and civil rights.¹¹ But Stambolov let pass the right moment for stepping down. Some authors describe the drama of the

⁹ Elena Statelova and Radoslav Popov, eds., *Stefan Stambolov i negovoto vreme. Nepublikovani spomeni* (Stefan Stambolov and his times. Unpublished memoirs) (Sofia: Detelina, 1993); Daniil Yurukov, *Spomeni iz politicheskiya zhivot na Bŭlgariya* (Memoirs from the political life in Bulgaria) (Sofia, 1932); Mikhail Madzharov, *Ot samovlastie kŭm svoboda i zakonnost* (From despotism toward freedom and rule of law) (Sofia, 1936), esp. 3–32; Velcho Velchev, *Prinos kŭm novata ni istoriya. Stambolov i Ferdinand. Diktatorskiyat rezhim i borbata protiv nego* (A contribution to our contemporary history. Stambolov and Ferdinand. The dictatorial regime and the struggle against it) (Sofia, 1922), esp. 26–29, 80; Toma Vasilyov, *Spomeni za litsa i sŭbitiya prez XIX–XX vek* (Memoirs about personalities and events during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries) (Sofia, 1934), esp. 111–112; Todor Girginov, *Istoricheski razvoi na sŭvremenna Bŭlgariya ot Vŭzrazhdaneto do Balkanskata voina 1912* (The historical development of contemporary Bulgaria from the Revival to the 1912 Balkan War) (Sofia, 1934), esp. 246–249. With sympathy for Stambolov (though acknowledging the persecutions against political opponents by vicious local authorities): Ivan Salabashev, *Spomeni* (Memoirs) (Sofia, 1943), esp. 43–140. Salabashev served as minister of finance and minister of justice under Stambolov.

¹⁰ Velcho Velchev, *Prinos kŭm novata*, 81–83.

¹¹ Toma Vasilyov, *Spomeni za litsa*, 114; Dobri Ganchev, *Spomeni za knyazheskoto vreme* (Memoirs about the prince's times) (Sofia: Izdatelstvo na OF, 1883), 202; Petŭr Neikov, *Zavchera i vchera. Skitsi ot minaloto* (The day before yesterday, and yesterday. Sketches from the past) (Sofia: Bŭlgarski pisatel, 1959), 57.

dictatorship vividly: the isolation of Stambolov, deserted by his more prominent associates and surrounded by loyal, but spineless and corrupt, people. There is also the psychological dynamics and the trap of the dictator: a growing mistrust and fear, hence persecution of the opponents that makes them embittered and determined for revenge. This in turn heightens the dictator's suspicion and fear and makes him increase the safety precautions (arms, bodyguards, spies) and the persecutions, which in turn increase the bitterness and exasperation of the opponents and so on until the inevitable end.¹² Stambolov predicted exactly where and by whom he would be killed, and he denounced Ferdinand and the government as the "moral perpetrators" of his murder.¹³

Contemporaries left numerous impressions of Stambolov's personality. He is remembered for his force of will, extraordinary energy, determination, and covert ferocity, underlined by his high cheekbones (which some call Tartar-like) and broad forehead. He possessed a talent to attract and fascinate people with his speech (he was a good orator), with songs and jokes, and an infectious laughter—a real charismatic gift to enthrall and lead people.¹⁴ A telling detail is Stambolov's passion for gambling, at which he usually won, including by cheating (he justified himself that such was the "trade"), but especially because he did not interrupt playing even when he was losing, but doubled the stakes until he could win back the losses. As one author put it, he was using "the same method in politics and in the game."¹⁵

Stambolov is described with special insight by the prince's attendant Dobri Ganchev, who points to a combination of seemingly incompatible traits in this "poet-statesman." On the one hand, he had a magnanimity and generosity, a love for songs and poetry (he composed songs himself)

¹² Dobri Ganchev, *Spomeni za knyazhetskoto*, 174–176, 195–197; Velcho Velchev, *Prinos kŭm novata*, 29; Toma Vasilyov, *Spomeni za litsa*, 111.

¹³ A. H. Biman, *Stambolov. Biografiya* (Stambolov. A biography) (reprint, Sofia: Nauka i izkustvo, 1990; first published 1896), 213–214; Petŭr Peshev, *Istoricheskite sŭbitiya i deyateli ot navecherieto na osbobozhdenieto ni do dnes* (Historical events and actors from the eve of liberation until today) (Sofia: Izdatelstvo na BAN, 1993; first published 1929), 291–292.

¹⁴ Velcho Velchev, *Prinos kŭm novata*, 107–109; Dobri Ganchev, *Spomeni 1864–1887* (Memoirs 1864–1887) (Sofia, 1939), 89–91. Petŭr Peshev, *Istoricheskite sŭbitiya*, 297; Nikola Genadiev, *Stambolov* (Sofia, 1925), 6; Petŭr Neikov, *Zavchera i vchera*, 41, 62–63, 66. A description of Stambolov's appearance in Richard von Mach, *Iz bŭlgarskite burni vremena* (On the Bulgarian tempestuous times) (Sofia: Strelets, 1992; first published 1929), 19.

¹⁵ Dobri Ganchev, *Spomeni za knyazhetskoto*, 63–64.

and for nature, a craving for good company (he told amusing anecdotes and ribald jokes), a nice voice and pleasant laugh, and a longing for sensual love. On the other hand, he sometimes demonstrated a lack of scruples and an inexorable cruelty in imposing his ideas and views, an excessive and offensive sense of power, sharp and malicious language, self-confidence and ambition, arrogance toward the will and opinion of others, rancor and vengefulness, and persecution of his opponents (not always for reasons of principle): “much blackness, a deep night was in the soul of this poet-statesman.”¹⁶ It was exactly this ambition and indomitable fighting spirit that drove Stambolov to attack even when he was in the worst situation; if it was impossible to win, he simply had to perish.¹⁷

The question was often asked (first by contemporaries): how justified was the dictatorship? Stambolov himself justified the emergency measures by citing the external threat and the “rescuing of the fatherland.” He was very outspoken in the National Assembly (*Narodno sŭbranie*), which was composed mainly of supporters of the regime in elections manipulated by the authorities, and was reduced to a simple executor of his will: “I am not a Pharisee politician, I do not strain out gnats while swallowing camels [i.e., I am not distracted by trivial matters], but I walk straight to the goal. When according to my inner conviction a thing has to be done for the rescue of the fatherland, I will do it.”¹⁸

For the Russophiles, persecuted by the regime, the external danger was, of course, a sham; besides, for them Russia could not present a danger, and the dictatorship had no justification. But even for moderate observers such as Velcho Velchev, the argument about rescuing the country was valid only during the initial years and against the conspirators, but not for persecuting personal opponents in the last years, when it served as a justification for Stambolov’s ambitions.¹⁹ The same author, an opponent of Stambolov’s dictatorship from a liberal-democratic position, also points out the unfortunate consequences of Stambolov’s stabilization of Prince Ferdinand (who would later be greatly responsible for the defeat in the wars).²⁰

Some have justified Stambolov’s heavy-handed rule (apart from the external danger) by citing the rough-and-tumble nature of Bulgarian po-

¹⁶ Ibid., 172–173, 174–175, 183–185, 201, citation on 185.

¹⁷ Ibid., 201, 204–205.

¹⁸ *Dnevniitsi na VII obiknoveno narodno sŭbranie* (Protocols of the Seventh Ordinary National Assembly), vol. 1, 141.

¹⁹ Velcho Velchev, *Prinos kŭm novata*, 156–158.

²⁰ Ibid., 154–155, 158.

litical life at the time. Thus according to Stambolov's sympathetic biographer A. Biman, political passions were so bitter that each party regarded the other as a physical enemy that had to be destroyed or mutilated. Stambolov then appears as a "strong man who defended his home."²¹ A similar argument is that many of the criticized features of his rule were continued under the governments that followed, starting with the subsequent government of the (personally irreproachable) Konstantin Stoilov. These features included acts of violence during elections (vividly described by the satirist Aleko Konstantinov, himself killed by mistake during Stoilov's term in office), dismissals en masse of civil servants and partisan appointments of new job-seekers, persecutions and settling of accounts with the partisans of the former government, the debasement of parliamentarism, and the misuse of power positions for personal gain, all of which discredited Stoilov's party (the People's or Narodnyashka Party) as well.²² However, others see the compromising of the bourgeois democracy specifically as a legacy of Stambolov.²³

In what sounds like an attempt at balance, the repressive aspect of the internal politics is offset or outweighed by achievements in foreign policy, but also by the stimulation of domestic development—most notably in education, urbanization, the economy, and the army.²⁴ I deliberately adduced the above arguments from the memoirs. We will see the same justifications of the regime repeated later on by professional historians in the efforts to rehabilitate Stambolov; conversely, the accusations are reproduced by other historians, who find his dictatorship and policies in general unjustified. The point is that both sides found their "theses" as well as the arguments prefigured in the opinions of contemporaries, whom they rarely cited, while some even look down upon the memoirs as "unreliable sources."

Somewhat later began the glorification of Stambolov and his policies for defending independence. Dimitŭr Marinov (a well-known ethnographer) set the tone with his 1909 book. Stambolov is characterized as one of Bulgaria's "great men," "great sons," and "beacons" in the Bulgarian national and spiritual path, and an example for "education, edification,

²¹ A. H. Biman, *Stambolov*, 210.

²² Velcho Velchev, *Stranitsi ot novata ni politicheska istoriya* (Pages from our contemporary political history) (Sofia, 1924), 22–26, 78–79, 293–295; Daniil Yurukov, *Spomeni iz politicheskiya*, 180–181; Toma Vasilyov, *Spomeni za litsa*, 117–119.

²³ For example, Velcho Velchev, *Prinos kŭm novata*, 159.

²⁴ For example, Petŭr Peshev, *Istoricheskite sŭbitiya*, 296.

and instruction” of future generations. All these men had their weaknesses and sins, but these pale compared to their “great deeds” and “feats and services” for the people, posterity, and history: “for us today they are bright and pure and surrounded by the halo of fame and immortality.”²⁵

In considering Russophilia in Bulgaria, Marinov differentiates between its sentimental aspect “as a feeling” of hopes and expectations toward Russia in the last centuries of Ottoman rule and of gratitude after the liberation, on the one hand, and its turning into politics and “an instrument for the achievement of political goals,” on the other hand, namely its utilization by Russia for interference in internal affairs and even for making the country into a “trans-Danubian province” (*zadunaiskaya guberniya*). Precisely from a political point of view, and in spite of the natural feeling of gratitude, the interests of Bulgaria and Russia diverged, as those of Bulgaria dictated the preservation of its freedom and independence. Moreover, Marinov blames the largely Russophile Bulgarian intelligentsia for lack of patriotism, for sacrificing the country’s liberty, and for being submissive and servile to Russia.²⁶

Marinov describes Russia’s goal as “enslaving the Bulgarian fatherland” and turning it into a “trans-Danubian province” (though Russia had to divide the Balkans with Austria) while the Bulgarian participants in the conspiracies inspired by Russia are accused of “treason” and “selling out the fatherland to foreigners” for gold and material benefits. From this point of view, Marinov sees as completely justified Stambolov’s firm and resolute actions against the conspiracies, the plots, and the treachery; he was a patriot and savior who preserved the freedom of the fatherland and of the state. To those who call Stambolov’s rule tyrannical and terrorist, Marinov retorts that the harshness and drastic measures were required by the extraordinary circumstances and the enemy. The terror was provoked by the conspiracies and betrayals, and the guilt falls more heavily on Russian diplomacy than on the Bulgarian government and state. He compares Stambolov to the great Bulgarian freedom fighters against Ottoman rule (Stambolov started his career as a national revolutionary himself), whom nobody would accuse of tyranny or terrorism and whose harshness was justified by the cause.²⁷ Marinov admits that Stambolov “may have been

²⁵ Dimitŭr Marinov, *Stefan Stambolov i noveishata ni istoriya* (Stefan Stambolov and our recent history). *Izbrani proizvedeniya v 5 toma* (Selected works in five volumes), vol. 5 (Sofia: Iztok–Zapad, 2004; first published 1909), esp. 15–18.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 123–127.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, esp. 343–349.

misguided in his convictions” and “may have wrongly understood the interests of the fatherland” but adds that “these are questions that cannot be decided by the present, but by the distant and the very distant future”; as for the rest, “he acted as he deemed proper.”²⁸

The widely acclaimed book of Simeon Radev (a journalist, diplomat, and historian), *The Builders of Contemporary Bulgaria*, was published in 1911. The history of the initial times after liberation, though based on documents, is rendered vividly in a patriotic spirit, with colorful psychological portraits of the first Bulgarian politicians, using direct speech at some points to dramatize the narrative, like a docudrama. As regards Stambolov, Radev admires him for standing up for independence against Russia. According to the book, Stambolov was not a committed Russophobe or a fanatic and even harbored Russophile feelings from his youth and wanted to restore relations with Russia, but without doing harm to the independence of Bulgaria.²⁹

The apotheosis and glorification of Stambolov reached a peak in Anton Strashimirov’s book, provocatively entitled *The Dictator* (1935). Strashimirov, a fiction writer, playwright, and ethno-psychologist, lavishes praise on Stambolov as “a mighty tribune and a powerful civic leader,” a person of talent, will, and character, and “unconscious intuition of things.”³⁰ In terms of “national psychology,” he possessed “Bulgarian authenticity, self-reliance, self-pride,” but also “morbid touchiness”; he “embodies the spiritual power of his people” and “represents the underlying spiritual element of Bulgarianism.” To the allegedly Bulgarian national qualities Strashimirov adds a “hot Southern temperament” and “an affectionate Slav character” but also a “Tartar” harshness, in which the “mixed blood” of the Bulgarian people made itself felt.³¹

Quite interesting is Strashimirov’s treatment of Russophilia/Russophobia as a generational conflict between “old” and “young,” fathers and children with a characteristic psychological dynamic. The masses, as well as the activists in the former struggles for church autonomy, were Russophile, deeply grateful to their “brothers”-liberators—a veritable Russification of the people’s soul. Hostile to tsarist Russia (though not to the Rus-

²⁸ Ibid., 346.

²⁹ Simeon Radev, *Stroitelite na sŭvremenna Bŭlgariya* (The builders of contemporary Bulgaria), vols. 1–2 (Sofia: Bŭlgarski pisatel, 1990; first published 1911). The above opinion about Stambolov is in vol. 2, 275.

³⁰ Anton Strashimirov, *Diktatorŭt* (The dictator) (Sofia: Strelets, 1993; first published 1935), esp. 69–70.

³¹ Ibid., 96–97, 162–163.

sian people) were the old national revolutionaries from Hristo Botev's circle and most of the educated people (Russian graduates, Bulgarian immigrants from Bessarabia, Russian émigré nihilists), under whose guidance the new Bulgarian generation was being formed. But both the old and the new generations, the fathers and the sons alike "live with the feelings and thoughts of Russian civil society" (drawn from the Russian literature read in Bulgaria): the "fathers" pay homage to the Russian tsar-liberator, while the "children" show a passionate interest in Russian social struggles and, under the influence of the French Revolution, Bakunin, and Marxism, become nihilistic toward Russian tsarism and "despotic Russia." Strashimirov also differentiates between "sentimental Russophobia" and "political Russophobia." The former cannot overcome the preliminary psychological Russification so widespread in Bulgaria and is even kindled with the "secret intention of a son to the father, that is, to achieve in the end a loving union with the liberator." This is not the case with "political Russophobia," which is based on a fear of Russian conquest and a "felt instinct for a Bulgarian state and national self-preservation." This has nothing to do with the "feelings of kinship," but with the political, economic, and cultural interests of Bulgaria. Similar political interests were exhibited by the Russian tsar, who, instead of melting with sympathy for the success of his Bulgarian "children" (i.e., in achieving the Union of 1885), became furious because of the divergence with Russian interests in the Balkans. According to Strashimirov, Bulgaria had to free itself from sentiments and to take care of its own political interests, in the name of which it had to be ready both for reasonable compromise and if necessary for "unyielding resistance" against tsarist Russia (which would have its own interests even if transformed into an ideal republic).³² Strashimirov thus defends a sober and firm national position vis-à-vis Russia. It is hardly surprising that the book was banned under communism (and locked up in the "special collection" of the National Library).

For Anton Strashimirov, Stambolov is, first and foremost, a great statesman. From a national revolutionary leader (during the Ottoman times), after liberation he became a statesman who demonstrated "political acumen" and a "striking versatility and depth."³³ He was a "Westerner" (*zapadnik*), but without illusions as regards the strivings of the (Western) Europeans "to catch us on their big and small hooks." Yet he was also confident the country could "break away from the hook," hence his brave

³² Ibid., esp. 137–140.

³³ Ibid., 163–164.

economic plans. At the same time he harbored Russophilia and populist romanticism in his soul.³⁴ Strashimirov seemingly does not deny the dictatorial nature of Stambolov. But, like Marinov, he tries to minimize it. Thus he points out that during Stambolov's entire rule over a "people mystically grateful to the Russians" and in spite of the conspiracies, there were not more than a dozen death sentences.³⁵

The Bulgarian ("narrow") socialists became Bolshevized and resolutely pro-Soviet after the October Revolution, but their attitude remained firmly "Russophobe," that is, against the policies of tsarist Russia in Bulgaria. The thesis that Russian tsarism served as a main prop of European reaction was propagated by Soviet Russia itself and was shared by the international communist movement. The school of the Russian historian Mikhail Pokrovsky was especially critical of Russian imperial policies and Russian nationalism. In the same spirit, P. Pavlovich (a pseudonym of the Bulgarian émigré-communist Panayot Topalov) published in 1935 a volume of documents entitled *The Adventures of Russian Tsarism in Bulgaria*. In the introduction the prominent Bulgarian Comintern leader Vasil Kolarov himself pointed out that the documents reveal the real motivation of the "so-called liberation mission" of Russia to the Bulgarian people, namely that the Principality of Bulgaria had to serve as a cover and a phase in Russia's plans for taking the approaches to Constantinople. To this purpose "all means of Asian-Byzantine diplomacy" were used, but the plans were frustrated by the "progressive anti-Russian party" of Stambolov.³⁶ The communist attitude toward the policies of tsarist Russia would later change abruptly, under the influence of Stalin—and changed in Bulgaria after some delay. The rule of Stambolov in particular was still interpreted as a struggle for the preservation of national independence from the encroachments of Russia, in a work by the pro-communist economic historian Zhak Natan

³⁴ Ibid., 164–165, 178–179, 181.

³⁵ Ibid., 150, 162. The dictatorship is interpreted as domination over the National Assembly in order to fight the Russophile conspiracies (179, 181).

³⁶ P. Pavlovich, ed., *Avantury russkogo tsarizma v Bolgarii. Sbornik dokumentov* (The adventures of Russian tsarism in Bulgaria. A collection of documents) (Moscow, 1935), iii, iv. P. Pavlovich (a pseudonym of Panayot Topalov) speaks of Russia's goal of turning Bulgaria into a trans-Danubian Russian province and about its tactics of supporting the Russophile émigré community in organizing conspiracies (vii–xxiv). Some documents on the objectives and the means of the tsarist diplomacy were published in Stambolov's time: *Dokumenti iz sekretnite arkhivi na ruskoto pravitelstvo* (Documents from the secret archives of the Russian government) (Sofia, 1893).

in 1938. It is characterized here as “unconditionally progressive” because it contributed to the rapid development of the productive forces of capitalism in spite of its repressive character and political terror.³⁷ As will be seen, similar evaluations continued for some time after the communist takeover on September 9, 1944.

The most professionally mature treatment during the “bourgeois era” of the dramatic events after the Union of 1885 and the rule of Stambolov comes from Ivan Panayotov (in works from 1924 and 1941). The Bulgarian issues are presented here against a broad international background of the relations between the great powers and their dynamic. I will restrict myself to Panayotov’s general frames and basic hypotheses and inferences.³⁸ The so-called “Bulgarian crisis,” which began with the unification of the two parts of Bulgaria in violation of the stipulations of the Congress of Berlin, developed amid the rivalry between the great powers for influence in Europe and elsewhere. The Bulgarian crisis fueled this rivalry further, which brought Europe to the verge of war and catalyzed the regrouping of the great powers in new alliances with the goal of restoring the balance. The point of departure was the League of the Three Emperors (*Dreikaiserbund*, involving Russia, Germany, and Austria-Hungary). But relations between Russia and Austria-Hungary deteriorated due to their rivalry over the Balkans, and they would eventually land in opposite camps in World War I. Bismarck, conductor of the “European concert,” tried to reconcile them, as Germany was interested in keeping the peace and the isolation of France. After failing to do so he acted to strengthen his closer ally, Austria-Hungary, by allying it with favorable forces (the so-called Mediterranean agreements of 1887 among Austria, Italy, and Great Britain for preserving the status quo in the Mediterranean, the Adriatic, and the Black Sea, directed in practice against Russia). Great Britain was in conflict with Russia in the Near East and in Central Asia and with France because of Egypt and other colonies, all of which inclined London toward the Central Powers (Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Italy). Russia and France (defeated by Germany in 1870–1871) remained isolated, and this pushed them toward rapprochement, of which Germany was espe-

³⁷ Zhak Natan, *Ikonomicheska istoriya na Bŭlgariya sled osvobozhdenieto* (Economic history of Bulgaria after the liberation) (Sofia, 1938), 199–200.

³⁸ Ivan Panayotov, *Bŭlgarskata kriza i Evropa 1885–1889* (The Bulgarian crisis and Europe, 1885–1889) (Sofia, 1924), esp. 5–11, 47–48, 87; Ivan Panayotov, *Rusiya, velikite sili i bŭlgarskiyat vŭpros sled izbora na knyaz Ferdinand 1888–1896* (Russia, the great powers, and the Bulgarian question after the choice of Prince Ferdinand, 1888–1896) (Sofia, 1941), esp. 92–93, 104–113, 135–139, 180–183, 195–197, 272.

cially afraid (but because of its preference for Austria, it could not hold Russia).³⁹

This is the background against which Bulgaria, with its unsettled status after the Union, became the point of conflicting interests of great powers, especially in the struggle for influence between Russia and Great Britain, as well as between Russia and Austria-Hungary. Russia was guided by its century-old imperial drive toward the Straits and access to the Mediterranean, hence the strategic importance of Bulgaria as a bridgehead to Constantinople. Precisely this (a core of the long-standing “Eastern Question”) was the conflict point with Great Britain, now exacerbated by their conflict in Central Asia (Afghanistan). At the same time Russia clashed with Austro-Hungarian interests for expansion in the Balkans, and Russia’s irritation increased with its loss of influence in Serbia (which fell under Austrian influence, though it had been liberated by Russia) while Greece (whose liberation Russia had also assisted) was under British influence. This made it even harder for Russia to accept defeat and the loss of influence in Bulgaria, which Russia took to heart as Bulgarian ingratitude.⁴⁰

The contradictions among the great powers made it possible for Bulgaria, under Stambolov’s firm and resolute guidance, to steer away from Russia (to a break in diplomatic relations) by relying on Great Britain and Austro-Hungary (and Italy), which precluded Russian occupation. And precisely the change in the international situation over time, namely the weakening of the British-Russian conflict, Britain’s drift away from the Central Powers (the Triple Alliance), and the strengthening of Russia’s position after its rapprochement with France made Bulgaria’s anti-Russian policies untenable and undermined Stambolov’s position.⁴¹

Against this international background Panayotov concentrates on the relations between Russia and Bulgaria, posing the question: how could the relationship between a liberator and a liberated people worsen and come to the breaking point? He finds fault more with the Russians than with the Bulgarians. The reasons were the Russian officials’ arrogance from the very beginning, behaving as if they were in a Russian province and disregarding Bulgarians’ sensitive national self-awareness; the interference of the Russians in domestic party disputes, which harmed Russia’s reputation; and the Russians’ negative reaction toward the Union and their presenting Bulgarians with an insoluble choice—Russia versus Prince Bat-

³⁹ Ivan Panayotov, *Bŭlgarskata kriza*, 5–6, also the summary of the unfinished part.

⁴⁰ Ivan Panayotov, *Rusiya, velikite sili*, 112–113.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 138–139, 183, 196.

tenberg (who in the meantime was glorified as a unifier and a military hero of the Serbo-Bulgarian War). In addition, Russia rejected the regency's attempts to settle the conflict after the abdication of Battenberg (e.g., to elect Prince Waldemar of Holland to the satisfaction of Russia) and interfered rudely in the internal affairs of the state (Kaulbars's agitation against the government, the war ships). Panoyotov finds the explanation for all this in the personality of the reactionary Russian autocrat Alexander III, who succeeded the liberal tsar-liberator Alexander II, as well as awkward Russian diplomacy, which often acted at cross purposes (between the tsar, Foreign Minister Nikolay Giers, the Russian ambassador to Istanbul, the Russian diplomatic agents in Sofia, the Russian generals, and the Slavophile circles in Russia). On the Bulgarian side the conflict was due to the spirit of independence, excited by the inadequate Russian actions and pushing toward a revolt against the liberator (in spite of the Russophile feelings) in defense of the fatherland.⁴²

Changing the perspective, or rather the scales, once again, Panayotov focuses on internal Bulgarian factors, struggles, and developments. When describing the split of politicians and public figures into two irreconcilable camps as a result of Russian actions, Panayotov does not side, for example, with the Russophobes, but relativizes both by saying how each referred to itself and to the enemy (and putting these appellations in quotes). Thus the Russophobes called themselves "patriots" and their opponents "traitors," while the Russophiles called their opponents "usurpers." Moreover, he points out that both believed in the righteousness of their cause and were convinced their policies would do good for Bulgaria (the Russophiles with the help of Russia). Scholarship is characterized by precisely such distancing and neutrality, sometimes improperly called "objectivity."

As for the politics of Stambolov, Panayotov points to the difficulty of reaching an "objective judgment" without going to the extremes of unconditional acceptance or rejection. Quite cautiously he says that this was the "most dynamic era" in Bulgarian post-liberation history, which left "indelible traces" on the domestic situation, given the sharp division and the recourse to foreign assistance. With his "heavy hand" Stambolov preserved the Union, enhanced the authority of the state, and thwarted external invasion. Having recognized these great accomplishments, Panayotov asks whether the hand of Stambolov was not too heavy and his rule (with

⁴² Ivan Panayotov, *Rusiya, velikite sili*, 104–109, 135–138; Ivan Panayotov, *Bŭlgarskata kriza i Evropa*, 8–11, 47, 87.

its arbitrary administration) too burdensome and whether the same results could not have been achieved by a softer rule with more legality and tolerance. He also asks whether Stambolov's otherwise successful foreign policy in defense of the Bulgarian independence from Russia was expedient and adequate in the end.

With obvious doubts regarding these policies, Panayotov set forth the following considerations in a 1941 work. First, Stambolov's successes were achieved with the support of great powers hostile to Russia (and according to Panayotov, even at the cost of Bulgaria's political independence and its subordination to these forces). Second, the threat that Russia posed to Bulgaria was not that great, considering that even without the Bulgarian reaction, Russia would not have been allowed to do as it pleased in Bulgaria. Third, with the change in the international situation, the great powers that supported Bulgaria improved their relations with Russia and disengaged themselves from Bulgaria. Finally, and perhaps most significantly, Stambolov's anti-Russian policy had "fateful consequences" on the Macedonian question because it made Russia look for other allies in the Balkans, namely the Serbs and the Greeks, and to support them at the expense of Bulgarian national interests. In the end Bulgaria was compelled to solve the Macedonian question on the principle of partition, which facilitated the national catastrophe.⁴³ Later on these hypotheses would be taken up as proven causality by many communist authors, who in general are greatly indebted to Panayotov (without acknowledging it). In adapting to the new situation, Panayotov himself substantially modified his views in a 1946 work that will be considered later.

The Marxist Historians on Stambolov's Regime

The interpretation of Stambolov's regime turned entirely negative after September 9, 1944. Domestic policies were interpreted in crude economic and social-class terms, which looked for class interests behind every political current and economic interests behind every foreign political orientation. Stambolov's foreign policy was retrospectively construed in the light of Bulgaria's new position within the Soviet camp with its Western capitalist enemies. From this point of view, the orientation toward Russia was unconditionally and a priori correct; thus the

⁴³ Ivan Panayotov, *Rusiya, velikite sili*, 93, 195–197.

pro-Russian forces in Bulgaria were correct and “historically justified.” Reliance on Russian help alone was portrayed as beneficial for Bulgaria, as shown by the two liberations—from Ottoman rule and from fascism. Deviations from the pro-Russian course—during Stambolov’s regime and later on in joining alliances against Russia (the Soviet Union) in World War I and World War II—were seen as huge mistakes. Until the end of communism, this looked quite natural and seemed to be confirmed by Bulgaria’s defeats when in alliances hostile to Russia (the Central Powers, the Axis Powers).

The problems arise when it comes to the actual rewriting from a priori pro-Russian biases of Bulgarian history, which is also a priori a national history—in other words, how to harmonize national interests with Russian interests in particular historical situations. This is especially true if the sources assess these situations very differently. It would be more convenient if Russia had always acted in defense of Bulgarian national interests, which cannot be disregarded by a national history (at least after the initial denunciation of “Great Bulgarianism”). But what if this is not the case, at least because Russia (the Soviet Union) had interests of its own that did not necessarily coincide with those of Bulgaria? Then why side with Russia and not with another great power?

The traditional Russophile answer to this question was that Russia is best for the Bulgarians by definition because of its natural affinity as a Slav and Orthodox country, the greatest and most powerful of the Slav and Orthodox countries and the only great power among them. To this was added gratitude for the liberation. But the Orthodox argument did not suit the communist regime, which was atheistic and even anti-religious, while the Slavic argument had a certain emotional value, but no place as argument in the new interpretative framework of Marxist historiography.

Then the strong argument on liberation comes to the fore, the first liberation being complemented with a second one—from fascism. For the first liberation in particular, the formula was repeatedly invoked that, regardless of tsarist Russia’s motives and goals (expansionist, imperialist), the objective outcome was liberation of the Bulgarians.⁴⁴ As far as can be determined, Vasil Kolarov was the creator of this formula positing the happy coincidence of the aggressive goals of Russian tsarism with Bulgar-

⁴⁴ About the application of this formula to the Russo-Turkish War of 1877–1878 (which brought about the liberation of the Bulgarians), see Roumen Daskalov, *The Making of a Nation in the Balkans: Historiography of the Bulgarian Revival* (Budapest and New York: Central European University Press, 2004), 208–210.

ian national interests.⁴⁵ We will see it applied to the subsequent development as well, also in the (negative) sense that any diversions away from Russia, whatever the motives, led to objectively bad outcomes for Bulgaria. In addition comes the argument that one has to distinguish between Russian tsarism on the one hand and the Russian people on the other. It goes unnoticed that this “brotherhood” argument between peoples is meant to justify relations between states and a certain state policy.

Everything in the Russophile writing of history has to show the attitude toward Russia as “special” and asymmetrical to that of the other great powers. To that purpose the other side of the asymmetry is also acted upon, namely through condemnation of the “Western” great powers and those who succumbed to their influence. The Bulgarians who turned toward them are traitors, while those who turned toward Russia are not (and are actually the true patriots). Bulgaria did not have any brotherly peoples or states in the West, nor could Bulgaria expect “objectively positive” results from Western states’ actions, whatever their intentions. Initially these states were given different rankings: Great Britain and France were the better among the bad while Austria-Hungary and Germany (“Germanism”) were the worst. The latter are precisely the states with which Bulgaria was allied during the two world wars, while the former were allied with Russia (the Soviet Union).

At this point an awkward reality intrudes. The earlier Bulgarian socialists (Blagoev, Krüstyú Rakovski, and even Vasil Kolarov in 1935) and one of the most respected thinkers of Marxism—Engels—disdained tsarist Russia as the prop of reaction and the “gendarme of Europe.” As will be seen, this contradiction was dealt with by a ban on Krüstyú Rakovski, a casuistic reinterpretation of Blagoev, and an updating of Engels by Lenin and Stalin, while Vasil Kolarov corrected himself. In 1948 Kolarov already differentiated between “subjectively” negative (aggressive, imperialist) goals and “objectively” positive (liberating, progressive) results of tsarist Russian policies in the Balkans, correcting his earlier, entirely negative views on Russia’s role. Thus while liberal Great Britain and semi-feudal Austria-Hungary, citing the principles of liberty and humanism, acted to preserve the Ottoman Empire in the Balkans, backward tsarist Russia acted for the Ottoman Empire’s disintegration and contributed

⁴⁵ Vasil Kolarov, *Osvobozhdenieto na Búlgariya ot tursko robstvo* (The liberation of Bulgaria from the Turkish yoke) (Sofia: Direktsiya na pechata, 1948). This is the opinion of Nikolai Genchev, *Izbrani proizvedeniya* (Selected works), vol. 5, *Spomeni* (Memoirs) (Sofia: Gutenberg, 2005), 266–267.

to the progressive development of the Balkans by liberating the young and vital Balkan nations.⁴⁶

A smaller problem came from the Russophobe authority of non-socialist Bulgarian public figures and politicians, although it was unpleasant if they had revolutionary credentials from the anti-Ottoman struggles like Stefan Stambolov and Zakhari Stoyanov (and even more so if they were first-rate national revolutionary leaders like Georgi S. Rakovski, who did not live to see liberation). The solution in this case was that the Russophobes were said to have undergone an ideological evolution after liberation and to have adopted reactionary positions. To dispel any doubts as to what their “sudden turn” was, they were said to have been on the right track up until the Union in 1885; also correct was their activity (particularly that of Zakhari Stoyanov) in realizing the Union (notwithstanding that the Union would become the principal reason for the conflict with Russia and the assertion of Russophobia).

The new paradigm asserted itself gradually until the beginning of the 1950s with a mixture of old and new tenets in some works and a belated reorientation of some authors. The transitional moment is registered in a 1946 work by Panayot Topalov (previously mentioned as editor of *The Adventures of Russian Tsarism*) that would soon become a target of critique. The introduction makes a politically correct presentation according to the new teaching, though with an old-fashioned Slavophile tinge: the modern history of Bulgaria demonstrates, first, the Bulgarian people’s democratic spirit, love for freedom, and striving for justice; second, “the strength of Slav solidarity and unity” with the great Russian people in the lead; and third, the fact that the Bulgarian people’s achievements are based upon a patriotism distinguished by its internationalist character. In their struggle for the freedom and independence of Bulgaria, the progressive social forces have always relied upon their two-time liberator—the great Russian people. Conversely, Bulgaria’s detours from Russian-led Slav solidarity and unity have always been the result of the treacherous role of the Bulgarian monarchy and Great Bulgarian chauvinism; from 1913 to 1944 these turned Bulgaria into a “German base [*Platzdarm*] in the Balkans” and a stronghold of German imperialism, thus betraying the national ideals.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Vasil Kolarov, *Osvobozhdenieto na Bŭlgariya*, 10–14.

⁴⁷ Panayot Topalov, “Borba na bŭlgarskiya narod za demokraticno ustroistvo i nezavisimost na Bŭlgariya (1878–1894)” (The struggle of the Bulgarian people for a democratic order and the independence of Bulgaria, 1878–1894), *Istoricheski pregled* 2, no. 4–5 (1945–1946): 435–481, esp. 435–436.

Topalov's mistake is that (as in 1935) he presents Stambolov as conducting a struggle for Bulgaria's independence against tsarist Russia. To make things worse, Stambolov led the "united progressive forces" of the Bulgarian people in its struggle against the "tsarist aggressions in Bulgaria" for its independence, and he fought against Dragan Tsankov's "illegal opposition" of "terrorist bands," which were engaged in riots, military mutinies, sabotage, and murders.⁴⁸ This political incorrectness cannot be offset by the characterization of political trends in class terms and that of Stambolov in particular as part of an "emerging new commercial-industrial bourgeoisie," the denouncement of Battenberg as "agent of the West European great powers," and the like. Even the assertion that in leaning upon Great Britain and in strengthening Ferdinand, Stambolov "objectively" created conditions for turning Bulgaria into a German stronghold in the Balkans cannot undo the harm.⁴⁹ Less important (for the communist regime) were the factual mistakes and fabrications in the narrative, which characteristically explains the entire Bulgarian history of this period through the influence of Austria and of "Germanism" (i.e., lumping Austria together with Germany).⁵⁰

In fact, Stambolov's rule was interpreted under the accumulated inertia as a struggle for independence even by high party functionaries, for instance, by Traicho Kostov in a short treatise (from 1947) on the developments after the Union of 1885. Kostov refers to what Dimităr Blagoev called the "Russophile superstition," meaning blind belief in Russia of Tsankov and his followers, and he affirms that tsarist Russia wanted to turn Bulgaria into a Russian province. Stambolov is credited with having led the struggle to defend the nation's independence from the encroachments of Russian tsarism.⁵¹

Ivan Panayotov, whose older publications have been considered above, adapted to the new regime in his article "Austria, Russia, and the Fate of the Balkans." Here he traced the Austro-Russian rivalry for the Balkans, generalized as Germanic-Slav rivalry and a "phase in the age-old struggle of Germanism against Slavdom." The pro-Russian viewpoint thus announced, from which Germanism is an aggressor ("aggressive Germanism") and

⁴⁸ Ibid., 457, 472–474, 477.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 456–457, 460–462, 477.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 452–453, 462–464, 466.

⁵¹ Traicho Kostov, *Leksii vŭrkhu istoriyata na Bŭlgarskata rabotnicheska partiya (komunisti)* (Lectures on the history of the Bulgarian Workers' Party [Communists]) (Sofia: Izdatelstvo na BRP [k.], 1947), 16–18.

Russia comes in defense of Slavdom, forms the basis of, and dominates, the analysis. One can mention the following points concerning Bulgaria: Austria interfered actively in Bulgarian affairs in counteracting Russian influence, and after the diplomatic break with Russia, Austria's influence in Bulgaria became "all-powerful"; this was reflected in the choice of Ferdinand (an officer from the Austrian army) as Bulgarian prince. Until the fall of Stambolov, Austria directed Bulgaria's foreign policy, hampering the restoration of relations with Russia. Russia was eventually able to regain its influence first in Serbia (with the abdication of Prince Milan) and later on in Bulgaria after Stambolov; the Balkan League (against Turkey) was concluded under Russian auspices. During the Balkan Wars (1912–1913), Austria redirected Serb interests towards Macedonia (and thus against Bulgaria) while Russia was trying to preserve good relations among the Balkan allies, though without success. Bulgaria alienated Russia with its drive toward Istanbul (the Bulgarian attack on Chataldja ordered by King Ferdinand). Bulgaria attacked the Serbs and the Greeks on the advice of Austria, initiating the Second Balkan (inter-allied) War. All in all, Bulgaria became "an agent of Austrian politics in the Balkans." Later on Russia drew closer to Serbia, who became Austria's main enemy. Austria's attempt to crush Serbia ignited World War I, in which the Austrian Empire was defeated and disintegrated.⁵²

Most importantly, Austria aspired to acquire territory in the Balkans, while Russia did not need territory and did not pursue an expansionist policy. Russia's goal was to protect the Balkan peoples, akin to it in race, language, religion, and spirit, from the "encroachments of aggressive Germanism," and, along with that, to prevent the fall of the eastern Black Sea coast into the hands of Germanism in order to safeguard Russia's own Black Sea coast from danger, hence Russia's stubborn struggle to keep the Black Sea basin, "if not in her own hands, then at least in the hands of the small and friendly nations."⁵³ One should note that the pro-Russian position is the very basis of the general framework (Germanism versus Slavism), so that it can be implied and asserted more effectively even without the crude falsification of facts, but rather with exaggerations and false general statements (e.g., that Bulgaria came under Austrian influence and even became an "agent" of Austrian ambitions in the Balkans). The events—the "facts"—are narrated (and appear) as Austrian aggression and

⁵² Ivan Panayotov, "Avstriya, Rusiya i sŭdbata na Balkanite" (Austria, Russia, and the fate of the Balkans), *Istoricheski pregled* 2, no. 4–5 (1945–1946): 482–512, esp. 482, 504, 505.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 511–512.

Russian self-defense and disinterested help for the Slav peoples threatened by Austria (but not by Russia).

The evaluation of Russophobia and of Stambolov's regime abruptly turned negative at the end of the 1940s and the beginning of the 1950s, as the impact of Stalinism resulted in the unconditional glorification of everything Russian. One telling example was a 1949 work on Petko Slaveikov, a prominent figure of the national Bulgarian Revival under Ottoman rule and a respected politician after liberation, by the historian Dimutŭr Kosev. Kosev rejected the prevailing treatment of the Russophobe regency and of Stambolov's government as a struggle for the defense of national independence against the aggressive intentions of tsarist Russia, as well as the explanation that the break in Bulgarian-Russian relations was due to blunders of tsarist diplomacy. According to him, the explanation for Bulgaria's pro-Western foreign policy in 1886–1894 lay in the internal social-economic development after the liberation. This period saw the emergence of the new big commercial-industrial bourgeoisie, whose representative was Stambolov's faction (and the faction of Vasil Radoslavov representing the lumpen-bourgeoisie). Because of its trading relations, primarily with the West, it preferred a Western orientation to the traditional Russian orientation. Its ideologists Stambolov, Zakhari Stoyanov, and Dimitŭr Petkov not only opposed the tsarist government and tsarist diplomacy, but ferociously attacked Russian culture and any Russian influence in Bulgaria, thus pursuing "anti-Russian and anti-people politics." As for the Russophiles, several currents can be identified. The extreme Russophiles headed by Dragan Tsankov represented part of the big commercial bourgeoisie (connected with the Russian market) and received subsidies and instructions from the tsarist government, approving all its actions, including an eventual occupation of Bulgaria. But there was another Russophile current, headed by Petko Karavelov and Petko Slaveikov, which expressed the interests and the sentiments of the middle urban and peasant bourgeoisie; this current was attached (and grateful) to Russia and was ready to sacrifice the Bulgarian prince in the name of Russia, but on the condition that independence and constitutional government were preserved. Finally, the third pro-Russian current was represented by emerging Bulgarian socialism, led by Blagoev, who was aware of the reactionary character of tsarism, but understood that breaking with Russia would be dangerous for Bulgaria.⁵⁴

⁵⁴ Dimitŭr Kosev, "Petko Rachev Slaveikov," *Godishnik na Sofiiskiŭa Universitet. Istoriko-filologicheski fakultet*, vol. 45 (1948–1949), book 2, *Istoriya* (Sofia, 1949), 1–154, esp. 118–123; Dimitŭr Kosev, "Nachalo na antiruskata politika na bŭlgarskata edra

The imposition of Russophilia in historiography had to cope with the “ideological evolution” of the Bulgarian (national) revolutionaries after the liberation, most notably of Zakhari Stoyanov (a very talented and popular author) as the ideologist of Russophobia and a close associate of Stambolov. This task was undertaken by Hristo Hristov, who asserted that the Bulgarian national-revolutionary intelligentsia made a “sharp turn to the right” in the mid-1880s and put itself entirely at the service of the new commercial bourgeoisie and later of the commercial-industrial bourgeoisie, helping establish its class domination. In the new economic and social-political situation, the former national revolutionaries abandoned the revolutionary and social ideas of the great patriotic revolutionaries of the past, which were later taken up by the socialists. In the public and political activity of Zakhari Stoyanov in particular, a sudden change occurred at the beginning of 1886. Stoyanov gave up his populist zeal in defending the “poor people” and put himself at the service of the new commercial-industrial bourgeoisie. He also forgot his own revolutionary past and became a supporter of the regime, turning from a republican into a reactionary and a courtier of Prince Ferdinand. He also turned against socialist ideas and the socialists. Hristo Hristov says the explanation for this ideological evolution lies in the change in the social-economic conditions of the “governing intelligentsia” after the liberation, namely its growing rich and moving to a new class position.⁵⁵ Stambolov’s regime is defined as “nothing more than a regime during which the new Bulgarian commercial-industrial bourgeoisie asserted and preserved its class domination over the small producers from the towns and the villages” and not a regime for safeguarding the national independence as presented previously.⁵⁶ The Russophobia of the former revolutionaries is interpreted as

burzhoaziya i P.R. Slaveikov” (Beginnings of the anti-Russian policies of the Bulgarian big bourgeoisie and P.R. Slaveikov), *Istoricheski pregled* 5, no. 2 (1948–1949): 165–185.

⁵⁵ Hristo Hristov, “Zakhari Stoyanov. Obshtestvena i politicheska deinost” (Zakhari Stoyanov. Social and political activities), *Godishnik na Sofiiskaya Universitet. Istoriko-filologicheski fakultet*, vol. 44 (1947–1948), book 2, *Istoriya* (Sofia, 1948), 3–154, esp. 3–4, 8, 15, 134–139; Hristo Hristov, “Otnoshenieto na Zakhari Stoyanov kŭm bŭlgarskoto natsionalno-revolutsionno dvizhenie i kŭm sotsializma” (Zakhari Stoyanov’s attitude towards the Bulgarian national-revolutionary movement and towards socialism), *Istoricheski pregled* 4, no. 2 (1947): 155–176; Hristo Hristov, “Ideinata evolyutsiia na bŭlgarskite revolutsioneri sled Osvobozhdenieto” (The ideological evolution of the Bulgarian revolutionaries after liberation), *Istoricheski pregled* 5, no. 3–4 (1948–1949): 418–450, esp. 419–420, 437, 442–447, 450.

⁵⁶ Hristo Hristov, *Zakhari Stoyanov*, 136.

“Austrophile patriotism” (with a reference to Zakhari Stoyanov’s statement that he would prefer Austrian occupation to Russian occupation).⁵⁷

In another work Hristo Hristov tackled Stambolov’s rule directly. He first blames the bourgeois Russophobe historians for presenting “Stambolov and the gang around him” as patriots who were risking their heads to rescue a fatherland threatened by a foreign yoke. The same mistake was made by Panayot Topalov in *The Adventures of Russian Tsarism*, but especially inexcusably in his work of 1945, published after Stalin’s notes on Engels’s article “The Foreign Policy of Russian Tsarism,” which were not taken into consideration.⁵⁸ For Hristo Hristov (as for Kosev) Stambolov represented one group of the big bourgeoisie, connected with the West European market, which was the basic reason for orienting the country to the West. Also important were the purely political attempts of the Western states to abolish Russian influence in Bulgaria, which the previous authors either ignored or presented as disinterested help, while the “crude interference” of Russian tsarism in the country’s internal affairs was treated as provoking anti-Russian feelings.⁵⁹ Stambolov’s dictatorship is interpreted as a “dictatorship of the big commercial-industrial bourgeoisie” over the petty bourgeoisie and the peasants, that is, as having a class rationale (instead of resulting from the confrontation with Russia). The recourse of the big bourgeoisie to an “open dictatorship” is further explained by its small numbers and its weakness, which made it impossible to maintain its rule any other way. Russophilia, for its part, apart from the economic interests of part of the bourgeoisie in doing business with Russia, stems from the “deep historical roots of Bulgarian-Russian friendship” and from the feeling of gratitude for liberation, which also gave the Bulgarian peasants the chance to acquire land.⁶⁰ Hristov sums up his views thus: Stambolov’s regime, which concealed itself “under the veil of a sham struggle for safeguarding national independence,” was “nothing more than a fight to impose and maintain the political domination of the most rapacious part of the big bourgeoisie.” Bulgaria had to conduct politics in accordance with the class interests of this bourgeoisie and of its West European masters.

⁵⁷ Hristo Hristov, *Ideinata evolyutsiya*, 445–446.

⁵⁸ Hristo Hristov, “Kŭm harakteristikata na Stamboloviya rezhim” (On the characteristics of Stambolov’s regime), *Istoricheski pregled* 8, no. 1 (1951–1952): 19–49, esp. 19–20. The reference is to the work of J.V. Stalin, “O stat’e Engel’sa ‘Vneshnyaya politika ruskogo tsarizma’” (On Engels’s article “The foreign policy of Russian tsarism”), *Bolshevik* (1941), no. 9.

⁵⁹ Hristo Hristov, “Kŭm harakteristikata,” 23–26, 32–33, 47.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 34–35 (citation on 34).

Russophilia in Bulgaria was a broad social current that did not aim to help Russian tsarism in its aggressive policy but was “one of the forms for expressing the indignation and protest against the political suppression and exploitation by the big bourgeoisie.”⁶¹

Another contribution to analyzing Stambolov’s foreign policy was made by Yaroslav Yotsov in 1951. According to Yotsov, Stambolov (with his “clique”) saw himself as called upon to safeguard Bulgaria from “an alleged threat” from Russia and took upon himself “the impossible task of wringing from the heart of the Bulgarian people the feelings of attachment and gratitude toward its liberator—the great Russian people.” These efforts were in vain except with the emerging bourgeoisie, for whom Stambolov’s rule assured opportunities for plunder and the initial accumulation of capital. In the struggle against Russia, Stambolov leaned upon Great Britain and Austria-Hungary and thus turned into an agent of Great Britain in its imperialistic policies. Russia had no intention of conquering Bulgaria and only wanted to prevent the small Balkan states Russia had liberated from turning into satellites of Great Britain and Austria-Hungary. In this period Russia even could not conduct active policies in its aspirations toward the Straits; besides, such policies did not present a threat to Bulgaria’s existence. Thus the real basis for the anti-Russian policies of Stambolov’s coterie was the aspiration of the Bulgarian bourgeoisie for hegemony in the Balkans, which did not win Russia’s sympathies, because Russia had to take into account the interests of the other Balkan states as well.⁶² As can be seen, and leaving aside the impertinent phraseology, the interpretation must demonstrate that Russia and the West had different attitudes toward Bulgaria and asserts that only Russia was well-intentioned.

The postulates from the Stalinist era are summarized in the two-volume academic *History of Bulgaria*, in which Hristo Hristov authored the chapters on the regency and Stambolov’s rule. In short, during the regency, power passed into the hands of the big Anglophile and Austrophile bourgeoisie. This bourgeoisie pretended it had to defend independence against Russian aspirations to make Bulgaria into a “trans-Danubian province,” but the alleged aspirations were just Austrophile propaganda.

⁶¹ Ibid., 45–48 (citations on 45 and 48).

⁶² Yaroslav Yotsov, “Kŭm haraktersitikata na narodnyashkoto upravlenie (1894–1899)” (On the characteristics of the government of the People’s [Narodnyashka] Party, 1894–1899), *Istoricheski pregled* 8, no. 2 (1951–1952): 123–142, esp. 123–125, 130–133 (citations on 123 and 131).

Great Britain and Austria-Hungary encouraged Stambolov in the conflict with Russia, “posing as disinterested protectors of Bulgarian national independence.” Stambolov established a dictatorship of the big Anglophile-Austrophile bourgeoisie and introduced a brutal and tyrannical regime. The Russophiles of Dragan Tsankov and the broad masses waged a struggle against the dictatorship in the only possible way—with plots, conspiracies, and riots. Such was the mutiny in Russe, which was suppressed and the Russophile officers executed: “they died knowing that they had given their lives to preserve Russian-Bulgarian friendship and to abolish a tyrannical regime opposed by the majority of the people.” The choice of Ferdinand of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha as prince of Bulgaria, on the suggestion of Austria-Hungary, was another success for the West and a defeat for Russia, because the monarch showed himself to be “a true agent of Austro-Hungarian and German imperialism”; during his “personal regime” after the fall of Stambolov, Bulgaria became dependent on the Western imperialist states and suffered two national catastrophes.⁶³ The Anglophiles-Austrophiles in power sought to destroy the “centuries-old friendship and brotherhood between the Bulgarian and the Russian peoples.” The main opponents of Stambolov’s regime were led by Dragan Tsankov and Petko Karavelov, respectively; these groups formed the “illegal opposition” and acted from abroad, but the most staunch and stubborn opponents were the peasants. Even though the Russophile camp was composed of various groups, “the struggle of the Russophiles against the Anglophiles-Austrophiles was in general a class struggle of the petty urban bourgeoisie and the peasants against the capitalist oppression and exploitation of the big commercial-industrial bourgeoisie and of its West European supporters.”⁶⁴ The Bulgarian Church was also against Stambolov’s anti-Russian policies because it was connected with, and served the interests of, the Russian Orthodox Church and the Russophile part of the big bourgeoisie. Seeking Turkey’s support, Stambolov forbade armed struggle to liberate Macedonia from Turkish rule. He “only” wanted to solicit the appointment of more Bulgarian bishops there and opposed the Macedonian émigré community’s activities in Bulgaria. This is why that community turned against Stambolov’s regime, whose policies “hampered the movement for the liberation of Macedonia.”⁶⁵

⁶³ *Istoriya na Bŭlgariya v dva toma* (History of Bulgaria in two volumes), vol. 2 (Sofia: Nauka i izkustvo, 1955), 100–101, 104–105.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 116–117.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 116–123.

This is the most clear-cut and militant expression of the pro-Russian (pro-Soviet) view of Stambolov's rule at its peak, during the Stalinist years. Russophobia was declared equivalent to Anglophilia and Austrophilia, and it was denied any patriotic or national motive. Conversely, Russophilia was denied any anti-national element and was presented as, in fact, most patriotic—a negation of the “pseudo-patriotic” Russophobia. As one author would put it later: the Russophiles were actually “Bulgarophiles.” In any case, no contradiction was seen between Bulgarian patriotism (nationalism) and pro-Russian orientation; the latter by definition harmonized with the former and even enveloped it, just as in traditional Slavophilia and contemporary Soviet internationalism. Simply put: a positive attitude towards Russia (an euphemism for subordination) is good, while a positive attitude towards the West is bad. This not only reversed the contemporary Stambolovist interpretation of Russophilia as treacherous, so that now Russophobia was treacherous, but annulled scholarly attempts at gaining a critical distance from the “philes/phobes” struggles by putting them on the same level (putting them, so to say, in quotation marks) for a more neutral analysis. In accordance with these fundamental value assumptions, the historical events and actors after the Union of 1885 were reinterpreted and adjusted to the needs of the pro-Soviet communist regime. Historical scholarship was thus placed directly at the service of politics—what may be called politicized (and ideologized) history.

Stambolov's rule has traditionally been characterized as a dictatorship that employed violence and “terror” in persecuting its opponents. But the dictatorship was specified here as class domination—the (unconcealed) dictatorship of the big commercial-industrial bourgeoisie, which exploited the people and leaned on the West European imperialist states and on the monarch as their “agent” in Bulgaria. In this class construct, the liberal-democratic notion of dictatorship as trampling upon individual and civil rights and freedoms is entirely absent. The lack of interest in Stambolov's personality may be due to the Marxist vulgate, in which historical personalities matter only as “representatives” of classes (the communist leader himself acts in the name of a party, which acts in the name of a class). Characterizing the parties and of the regime in terms of class, as well as treating Bulgarian post-liberation society in general as a class society, falsifies historical realities, as will be shown in the later revisions of the historical narrative. The same applies to the search for economic reasons (interests) for the foreign political orientation.

Of particular note is the treatment of Stambolov's policies on the “national question.” His pro-Turkish policy, seeking peaceful promotion

(through schools and the church) of the Bulgarian consciousness in Macedonia until the right time for unification, appears in a crudely distorted form. It is presented as anti-national (ironically, by a regime that denounced “Great Bulgarian” nationalism and chauvinism around the same time) because of the “collaboration” with the former oppressor and because it did not give free rein to the armed Macedonian movement. As will be seen, Stambolov’s national policies would later be presented as harmful to the national cause in more subtle ways.

A characteristic point is the stress on the socialists’ participation in the struggles against Stambolov’s regime. Evidence of a socialist struggle is difficult to take seriously; it amounts to the fact that high school students formed Marxist circles and that some high schools had “unrest” under socialist influence. It is also affirmed (falsely) that the socialists suffered most from Stambolov’s tyranny.⁶⁶ Another point consists of the emphasis on Bulgarian-Russian ties during Stambolov’s regime—revolutionary, but also economic and cultural-educational. The purpose is to show that the “friendship” between the two peoples did not cease even under Stambolov’s anti-Russian and “terrorist” regime.⁶⁷ Later on this will be reinterpreted as evidence that the regime obviously had not been so anti-Russian as to ban such ties (and not so anti-socialist, to judge from the founding of the Socialist Party in 1891 and its subsequent activities).

Conversely, any attempt to point out (alongside the positive points) some negative points about relations with Russia was strictly censored until the very end of the socialist era. One example is the book by Nikolai Genchev titled *Bulgarian-Russian Cultural Exchanges during the Revival*, which was published in 1976, but immediately withdrawn from circulation and destroyed. The reason is that it reveals the negative effect of the transfer of Bulgarian population to Russia and the transfer of Tartars and Circassians from Russia to Bulgaria during the Ottoman era; it also views the acceptance of Bulgarian students in Russian universities, among other

⁶⁶ Dobrin Michev, “Uchastieto na bŭlgarskite sotsialisti v borbata protiv Stamboloviya rezhim” (The participation of the Bulgarian socialists in the struggle against Stambolov’s regime), *Izvestiya na Instituta po istoriya na BKP*, vols. 1–2 (Sofia, 1957), 47–78, esp. 47–61, 76–78; Trendafil Mitev, “Politicheskata obstanovka v pŭrvite godini na Stamboloviya rezhim i bŭlgarskite sotsialisti (1887–1891)” (The political situation in the initial years of Stambolov’s regime and the Bulgarian socialists, 1887–1891), *Istoriчески pregled* 37, no. 2 (1981): 52–74.

⁶⁷ Anatoli Martinenko, “Rusko-bŭlgarskite vrŭzki po vreme na razriva na diplomatičeskite otnosheniya (1886–1896)” (Russian-Bulgarian ties during the break in diplomatic relations, 1886–1896), *Istoriчески pregled* 26, no. 3 (1970): 58–65.

things, as deliberate policies of spreading Russian influence.⁶⁸ In the same vein, the preliminary agreement between Russia and Austria-Hungary (and later with Great Britain) not to enlarge the Bulgarian state after liberation, which is well-known in the history of diplomacy, was concealed in Bulgarian historiography until the end of the communist regime. Only Great Britain and Germany were blamed for the “dismemberment” of Bulgaria from the preliminary Treaty of San Stefano of 1878 (i.e., before the Treaty of Berlin). All books that showed the role of Russia in a negative light were taken out of circulation and put in classified “special collections” in the libraries.

Another special theme was the “elucidation” (in fact, reinterpretation) of the attitude of Blagoev and other early socialists toward tsarist Russia. The problem here was that not only Blagoev (and Krüstyū Rakovski) but also Engels (and Plekhanov) considered Russian tsarism to be the most reactionary power in Europe, the oppressor of its own people and other peoples; and they considered the Western liberal states to be promoters of (bourgeois) progress.⁶⁹ As mentioned, the negative evaluation of Russian tsarism continued after the October Revolution in Russia and in the international communist movement. Things began to change with Lenin and especially with Stalin, who partly rehabilitated Russian tsarism in justifying his own imperial policies and in promoting Soviet patriotism.⁷⁰

The new (Stalinist) attitude towards tsarist Russia required a reinterpretation of the views of the Bulgarian socialists and especially of the “founder” Blagoev, whose attitude in general was strongly negative. It was now affirmed (based on flimsy “indirect” evidence) that while initially he was influenced by the negative views of Engels and the social democracy of the Second International (Georgi Plekhanov, August Be-

⁶⁸ Nikolai Genchev, *Bŭlgaro-ruski kulturni obshtuvaniya prez Vŭzrazhdaneto* (Bulgarian-Russian cultural exchanges during the Revival) (Sofia: LIK, 2002). The book was completed in 1973 and, for the next three years, remained in the publishing house Nauka i Izkustvo; it was printed in 1976 and immediately confiscated. Genchev also points to the negative effect on the Bulgarians of the population exchanges between the Russian Empire and the Ottoman Empire.

⁶⁹ On the anti-tsarist views of Plekhanov, Bebel, Liebknecht, and other prominent figures from the Second International and their influence upon Krüstyū Rakovski and Dimitŭr Blagoev, see Angel Vekov, “Bŭlgarskite sotsialisti na Zŭrich-skiya kongres na Vtoriya internatsional” (The Bulgarian socialists on the Zŭrich Congress of the Second International), *Vekove* 16, no. 1 (1987), 5–16, esp. 11–12.

⁷⁰ About particulars, see Ilcho Dimitrov, “Delo na chisti hora” (A deed of pure persons), in Ilcho Dimitrov, *Ravnosmetkata. Istoricheski ochertsii i statii* (The balance sheet. Historical essays and papers) (Plovdiv: Hristo G. Danov, 1989), 88–113, esp. 95.

bel), in the 1890s he came to understand that Russian tsarism was not the only gendarme of Europe and could not be a threat to Bulgaria in particular.⁷¹ According to Ilcho Dimitrov, more realistically, Blagoev did not alter his uncompromising critique of the reactionary regime of tsarist Russia and did not idealize in the least Russia's policies in the Balkans. However, he thought that the interests of Bulgaria required reconciliation with Russia (actually putting the views of the early Blagoev from "Our Apostles" before those of the later Blagoev). Ilcho Dimitrov takes to defending Russophilia himself and points out that the "Russophile superstition" (as Blagoev called blind reliance on Russia) actually issued from the "lived-through historical experience of the Bulgarian people."⁷²

Ilcho Dimitrov downplayed the anti-Russian legacy, especially in the previously mentioned volume of documents *The Adventures of Russian Tsarism in Bulgaria*. Without denying the authenticity of the documents, he questions their selection and arrangement, as well as their "propaganda" purpose and "tendentiousness." As he points out, soon after the publication of these documents, a turnabout took place in Soviet historiography toward justification and even praise of the foreign policy of tsarist Russia, so that even a mention of "adventures" and "misdeeds" of tsarism became an act of "ideological sabotage" and anti-Sovietism. The same attitude was applied to Stambolov and Russophobia, which were now condemned, while Russophilia was praised as truly patriotic not because of scholarly considerations, but because of the change in Soviet politics; this in turn nurtured the cult of Stambolov (in reaction). Ilcho Dimitrov regrets this politically motivated swing from one extreme to the other and asks how such extremes can be avoided. His general answer, however, is less than satisfactory: a Rankean study of the facts "such as they are" without a preconceived thesis, plus advice to draw inferences by taking into consideration the options available at the time and "historical practice," that is, "which line of action came to be historically justified by subsequent developments."⁷³ Also hardly satisfactory is his pointedly Russophile interpretation of Stambolov's rule (that follows this argument for scientific "objectivity"), which coincides with the then-official thesis

⁷¹ Trendafil Mitev, "Politicheskata obstanovka," 72–73.

⁷² Ilcho Dimitrov, "Dimitŭr Blagoev i Sŭedinenieto 1885 godina" (Dimitur Blagoev and the Union of 1885), *Voennoistoricheski sbornik* 55, no. 2 (1986): 15–28, esp. 21–22, 24–25 (citation on 25).

⁷³ One can see here, of course, a euphemism for the victor's viewpoint.

as opposed to the “creeping” rehabilitation of Stambolov.⁷⁴ Thus while the dependence of the historiographical interpretation on the political context (and on the Soviet Union in particular) is clearly stated, the inferences drawn are the opposite to what one would expect.

Until quite recently, every attempt to view Stambolov’s personality and politics in a positive light encountered strong resistance. The vicissitudes of the new edition of Simeon Radev’s very influential book *The Builders of Contemporary Bulgaria*, wrongly considered by some as “a gospel of Russophobia,” are a case in point.⁷⁵ Another case is Aleksandŭr Berovski’s 1968 historical novel *Crown and Blood*, in which Stambolov is presented as a hero and patriot. According to Berovski, Stambolov violated democracy and liberalism in the name of higher ideals (the ideal thus implied is independence from Russia).⁷⁶ In a critical review of the book, the old-guard historian Hristo Hristov objected to the “inadmissible idealization” of Stambolov by Berovski (under the influence of Simeon Radev) and his depiction as a “most exalted patriot,” since he actually turned into a “die-hard monarchist” and a “cruel tyrant” as well as an “anti-Russian agent of the Western capitalist states.” Hristov also objected to the presentation of Stambolov’s friendly relations with Turkey (in an attempt to obtain advantages in Macedonia) as patriotic and wise; in his view they were anti-national, because only Russia could help with national unification.⁷⁷

The broader public’s enormous appetite for these books (*Builders of Modern Bulgaria* sold at least 100,000 copies) attests to the availability of mass patriotic (and nationalist) attitudes. The real problem for the communist authorities was not nationalism per se (as the regime was becoming increasingly nationalist itself), but relations with Russia and the analogy that could be drawn between the past and the present, in which the

⁷⁴ Ilcho Dimitrov, “Delo na chisti hora,” 92–97.

⁷⁵ The authorities repeatedly denied permission to reissue the book until the influential literary scholar Pantalei Zarev succeeded in getting the assent of Todor Zhivkov. The editing was entrusted to historians Ilcho Dimitrov, Elena Stelova, and Andrei Pantev. The appearance of the book, which sold out immediately, provoked the strong reaction of the most retrograde milieus and of Moscow. See Ilcho Dimitrov, *Vsichko teche. Spomeni* (Everything flows. Memoirs) (Sofia: Tiliya, 2000), 122–123.

⁷⁶ Aleksandŭr Berovski, *Korona i krŭv* (Crown and blood) (Sofia: Izdatelstvo na OF, 1967), esp. 874.

⁷⁷ Hristo Hristov, “Za istoricheskata pravda v knigata na Al. Berovski “Korona i krŭv” (Regarding the historical truth in Al. Berovski’s “Crown and blood”), *Istoricheski pregleđ* 26, no. 3 (1970): 104–106.

complete subjugation of communist Bulgaria to the Soviet Union seemed to confirm and justify retrospectively the worst fears of Stambolov and the Russophobes.⁷⁸

Towards Stambolov's Rehabilitation

Only in the beginning of the eighties did a slow and painful rehabilitation of Stambolov (and his politics) begin; it encountered considerable resistance and remained partial and inconclusive. The question arises: Why so late? especially as the assertion of the national point of view in treating the national Revival era dates from the end of the sixties and the beginning of the seventies. The answer obviously has to do with the nature of the Bulgarian communist regime, which relied so heavily on the Soviet Union. The interpretation of Stambolov's rule touched upon this main prop of the regime (the other one being the power monopoly of the Communist Party), and a positive appraisal of his anti-Russian policies could be construed as dissent and opposition. Such is the logic of the direct politicization of history and instrumentalizing it for the legitimization of power: writing history on certain issues means "making politics"—in other words, it becomes highly politically relevant.

The change in the climate around Stambolov dates from the end of the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s. The new spirit is recognizable in Elena Statelova's work on Bulgarian diplomacy from 1878 to 1886. Though it is dedicated to the previous and less politically fraught period, it briefly reappraises some issues of Russophobia and of Stambolov's initial policies; the very tone of the analysis is different from the earlier militant and condemnatory style. Statelova points to the disappointment of part of the Bulgarian bourgeoisie and the intelligentsia with the negative Russian reaction to the Union in 1885. The turn towards Austro-Hungary and Great Britain is presented not as falling into dependency, but as seeking support for the Union. Still, according to Statelova, this was not in accordance with the vital interests of the country (whose natural protector was Russia), and the vast majority of the Bulgarian people and many of the politicians preserved their Russophile attachments and orientation. There

⁷⁸ Such a parallel in Karel Durman, *Lost Illusions: Russian Policies towards Bulgaria in 1877–1887* (Uppsala, Sweden: Uppsala University, 1987), 174. But the book is too one-sided, mostly showing the bad treatment of the Bulgarians by the Russians during the Liberation War of 1877–1878 and until 1887.

is an account of Petko Karavelov and Stambolov's attempts at reconciliation with Russia and the Russian diplomats' misguided understandings and actions, which amounted to "interference of Russia in the country's internal affairs." The polarization of the Bulgarian society (for or against Prince Battenberg and the subsequent "dynastic crisis") is attributed to international relations, especially the Russian-British rivalry in the Balkans, as well as to the "delusions and errors of tsarist diplomacy." Stanelova objects to explanations of Russophilia and Russophobia in terms of the economic interests of various sections of the bourgeoisie: the Bulgarian economy was too backward, with weak industries and insignificant foreign trade, for such interests to play a role in external political orientation. Much more important for the orientation of the various social forces at this time were factors such as political partisanship, personal ambitions, upbringing and education, convictions, and kinship ties.⁷⁹

The Union of 1885 is the topic of a book by Ilcho Dimitrov. Much of the book deals with relations with Russia and the other great powers. The work has a subtle Russophile tendentiousness, expressed in the considerable attention to Russia's motives in taking a negative stand (with understanding and empathy); the view of Russian politics as always somehow essentially harmonizing with Bulgarian national interests (with this one exception); and the politics of the other great powers, and of Great Britain in particular, as again in principle unfavorable to Bulgaria (in which support for the Union is an "opportunistic" exception).⁸⁰ In addition, even if the new anti-Russian orientation of Bulgarian foreign policy seemed justified at the time, it proved to be "ill-fated for the Bulgarian national cause" in the long run.⁸¹

The development of the national question (i.e., regarding the irredenta) is the topic of a strongly pro-Russian article from 1981 by Simeon Damyanov. The deterioration of relations between Bulgaria and Russia is attributed to "errors committed by both sides." It should be noted here that the distribution of blame for destroying relations with Russia is indicative of the position of a given author: the Stalinist hard-liners put the blame primarily on Bulgaria, and the "revisionists" on Russia, while Damyanov

⁷⁹ Elena Stanelova, *Diplomatsiyata na Knyazhestvo Bŭlgariya 1879–1886* (The diplomacy of the Principality of Bulgaria, 1879–1886) (Sofia: Izdatelstvo na BAN, 1979), esp. 220–221, 225–226, 228–229.

⁸⁰ Ilcho Dimitrov, *Epokha 1885. Istoricheski ocherk za sŭedinenieto na Severna i Yuzhna Bŭlgariya*. (Era 1885. A historical outline of the union between Northern and Southern Bulgaria) (Sofia: Narodna mladezh, 1987), esp. 199–219, 227.

⁸¹ Ibid., 218, similarly 215.

opts for a compromise. Damyanov considers the break with Russia a mistake, because even if the Russian policies had their own goals, they objectively benefited the Bulgarian cause. Conversely, Stambolov's efforts to solve the national question proved fruitless because of resistance of Great Britain and Austria-Hungary, from whom he expected support. Moreover, by reorienting the country towards them, Stambolov and his followers caused Bulgaria "enormous harm," and his policies had "fatal consequences." Russia began to favor Serbia and thus gave it the opportunity to expand its propaganda in Macedonia and subsequently to claim a part of it. Stambolov forgot the "simple truth" that the restoration of the enlarged Bulgarian state of the (preliminary) Treaty of San Stefano could be effected "most easily and naturally" with the help of the power that had created it, and not by relying on the states that had dismembered it at the Congress of Berlin (no mention is made of Russia's prior consent to that). Stambolov's government could do no more than solicit from Turkey a few appointments of Bulgarian bishops in Macedonia.⁸²

The further development of the Bulgarian national question is traced by Damyanov in the following way. The Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization was created in 1893 to defend the Bulgarian population in Macedonia and Eastern Thrace (around Adrianople). On St. Elias Day in 1903, it organized the Ilinden Uprising, whose cruel suppression by the Ottoman authorities provoked the interference of the European great powers. Russia and Austria-Hungary worked out the Mürzsteg Reform Program, but it failed. Then came the intervention of Great Britain, who (in counteracting German influence in Istanbul) wanted internationalization of the control over the implementation of the reform as well as administrative and financial autonomy of Macedonia (which coincided with Bulgarian interests). There was a possibility that Russia and France would support this initiative. But then the Young Turks launched their coup d'état (in 1908), and after the subject peoples' initial hopes for federation and cultural autonomy, the Turkish government took a firm nationalist course. The Balkan Alliance was then formed under Russian auspices, and Bulgaria and Serbia agreed to divide Macedonia except for a "disputed area," whose possession was to be eventually decided under Russian arbitration. According to Damyanov, when called on to arbitrate after the First Balkan War, Russia did not want to "hurt" any of the par-

⁸² Simeon Damyanov, "Velikite sili i Bŭlgariya prez epokhata na kapitalizma (1878–1944)" (The great powers and Bulgaria in the era of capitalism, 1878–1944), *Istoričeski pregled* 37, no. 3–4 (1981): 73–94, esp. 76–79.

ties, but did not trust the Bulgarian king and was more favorably inclined towards Serbia. Then followed the Second Balkan War (the Inter-Alliance War, i.e., between the allies), which ended in the defeat of Bulgaria and the loss of most of Macedonia. The outcome of the Balkan Wars largely conditioned the choice of allies in World War I, because Great Britain and France had a strategic preference for Serbia and Greece, while the Central Powers were more responsive to the Bulgarian claims. Thus Bulgaria ended up among the defeated nations in World War I (the so-called second national catastrophe), and Bulgarian national aspirations were once again frustrated.⁸³ As can be seen, Stambolov is at least not blamed for what happened in the wars, though Russia's inclination toward Serbia is not explained.

Worth mentioning is Stoicho Grüncharov's short review (1979) of *Foxy Ferdinand*, a book about the Bulgarian prince Ferdinand I by the Bulgarian émigré Steven Constant (a pseudonym of Stefan Danev), published abroad in 1979. Several assertions are of interest here. According to Grüncharov, speaking of "Austrophilia" in Bulgarian politics is misleading, and the Russophobe political parties were not, for that matter, Austrophile parties. Bulgarian politics between 1896 and 1913 (i.e., after the mending of relations with Russia) leaned more on Russian than on Austro-Hungarian support. Finally, Ferdinand's attempt to realize his "Byzantine dream" during the First Balkan War by ordering a Bulgarian attack on the Chataldja line as a bridgehead to Istanbul not only caused pointless casualties, but strongly and unfavorably influenced Russia's attitude in the dispute between Bulgaria and its allies.⁸⁴ In other words, Russia's attitude was not due to some preliminary bias, connected with Stambolov's era some twenty years earlier, but to other and more recent circumstances.

The shifting of perspectives on Stambolov obviously caused apprehensions among the architects of the old standpoint, to judge from a 1981 article by Hristo Hristov on the foreign policy of Bulgaria that touches on the interwar period as well. The general idea is that the Bulgarian national bourgeoisie, with its "shortsighted, narrow-class, and anti-people" politics, was not able to solve the national question. Stambolov in particular could not find the right way to defend the national interests. The break with Russia was a mistake, and Bulgaria did not, in fact, achieve national

⁸³ Ibid., 80–94.

⁸⁴ Stoicho Grüncharov, "St. Constant. Foxy Ferdinand (1861–1948). Tsar of Bulgaria. London: Sidwick and Jackson, 1979," *Istoricheski pregled* 37, no. 6 (1981): 111–116.

independence, but turned into an instrument of the anti-Russian policies of Great Britain and Austria-Hungary. For that reason Russia reoriented its diplomacy toward “support of the Serbian penetration in Macedonia” (referring to the Russian support for the appointment of the Serbian bishop Firmilian in Skopje in 1902).⁸⁵ But Hristov is already on the defensive.

The vindication of Stambolov and (in part) of his policies was systematically undertaken by Andrei Pantev, Stoicho Grüncharov, and Elena Statelova. Pantev in particular glorified Stambolov’s personality. One should note that of all the controversial aspects of Stambolov’s rule (such as dictatorship, policies towards Macedonia and the Western powers), relations with Russia were the most “sensitive” topic, a veritable historical and political taboo. It could not be reassessed in the historiography, but very cautiously and only indirectly modified by means such as “softening” of the vocabulary, various “excuses,” and indirectly via praise of Stambolov on other points.

The change starts, or is at least signaled, by two similar short journalistic essays by Andrei Pantev: one in the historical journal *Vekove* (Ages) in 1981 and the other in the newspaper *Otechestvo* (Fatherland) in 1982.⁸⁶ Pantev assumes a specific rhetorical and argumentative strategy to vindicate Stambolov. After appealing for a rejection of the extreme judgments—vilification and idealization, negation and adoration alike—and calling for a “balanced” scholarly approach, he proceeds by pointing out the positive points alongside the negative ones, and mitigates the negative ones in the process. Putting aside the (excessive) rhetorical means, here are the contents with an idea of the argumentative strategy: Stambolov was a “strong political figure”; he was not without faults, but while acknowledging them, one should not forget his days as an “apostle” (referring to his role in the national liberation movement), his recognized patriotism, and his accomplishments in building the state. As for Stambolov’s Russophobia, Pantev tries to mitigate it: there was “useless” defiance of Russia; both sides committed an “absurd act” in severing relations; Stambolov entered the “dangerous currents” of foreign influences, but his patriotism was sincere; and he did not feel “pathological” animosity toward

⁸⁵ Hristo Hristov, “Iz vŭtreshnoto razvitiie i vŭnshnata politika na nova Bŭlgariya” (On the internal development and foreign policy of modern Bulgaria), *Istoricheski pregled* 37, no. 3–4 (1981): 60–72, esp. 63–64, 69–72.

⁸⁶ Andrei Pantev, “Protivorechivoto nasledstvo na Stefan Stambolov” (The contradictory legacy of Stefan Stambolov), *Vekove* 10, no. 5 (1981): 69–78; Andrei Pantev, “Dramata na zhiviya. Koi e Stefan Stambolov?” (The drama of the living person. Who is Stefan Stambolov?) *Otechestvo* 7, no. 5 (1982), 22–23.

Russia, but distinguished between Russian policies and the Russian people and allowed and even stimulated educational and cultural exchanges as well as economic relations. Having described Stambolov's dictatorship and terror in strong language, Pantev asks the question: was his record all bad? Pantev then credits Stambolov with the following achievements: he laid the foundations for Bulgarian statehood (he "made" Bulgaria into a state); Bulgaria entered international relations as an "equal partner"; he got considerable legislation passed; he concluded trade agreements (which were a diplomatic breach in the unjust Treaty of Berlin); he engaged in vast economic projects for the modernization of the country; and he looked far into the future. In spite of the dictatorship, many opposition newspapers were published, and the Socialist Party was founded. Finally, precisely because he was so strong-willed a politician, he did not allow Prince Ferdinand to install a "personal regime," as did his political successors, who were otherwise so critical of him. As for the national question: Stambolov had a "cautious tactical approach" for consolidating the Bulgarian element in Macedonia; he pursued good relations with Turkey for the same purpose; orientation toward the Western powers did not lead to subordination, and he was a "demanding politician" for them as well. However, the hostile relations with Russia "pushed Bulgaria onto paths with far-reaching historical consequences," and Russia turned to other allies.

In sum: Stambolov is vindicated as a sincere patriot, a farsighted politician, an ambitious modernizer, and a great statesman who enhanced Bulgaria's international prestige. The praise of Stambolov's personality is central to the vindication of his policies. One can see here a symptom of the cult of "the great personality." But more important in this case is that this "strong personality," known for daring to oppose Russia and to assert national independence, presented (of course, implicitly) a counterpoint to the grayness and the subservience of the Bulgarian communist regime. He (surreptitiously) became a symbol of national independence and state sovereignty in times when they were no more; hence he was a source of national pride, independently of the results of his foreign policy (Pantev initially agreed that they were negative but would later change his opinion).

Stambolov's policies on the "national question" were treated in a highly positive light by Trendafil Mitev (in 1983). According to Mitev, Stambolov presented the "most entrepreneurial personality" among the post-liberation Bulgarian politicians. After the Union he had to work out a new and untraditional course on the national question precisely because of

the impossibility of relying on Russian political support. The alternative line was to maintain friendly relations with the suzerain, Turkey, and to seek support from the favorably disposed European great powers. Through these tactics he was twice able to win appointments of Bulgarian bishops in Macedonia and thus to strengthen the Bulgarian Church and schools there, which amounted to a “great victory” and created better conditions for the progress of the national (liberation and unification) cause. But collaboration with the Western states did not lead to success.⁸⁷

In 1984 a high-profile national historical conference dedicated to Stefan Stambolov took place in his native town, Turnovo. It expressed the vindication of Stambolov already under way, but also attested to related fears. Some participants insisted that a rehabilitation of Stambolov was not intended; other participants made statements indicating their reservations; and still other scholars refused to take part at all. Even the title of the conference is telling: “Stefan Stambolov—A Revolutionary and Man of Letters” (i.e., not a statesman). Furthermore, the publication of conference materials was unjustifiably delayed.⁸⁸ Most resolute was Andrei Pantev, who, in a florid rhetorical style, paraphrased his arguments from the articles already mentioned above. He characterizes Stambolov as one of “the greatest and most disowned personalities” in modern Bulgarian history, “a great statesman” (a “Bulgarian Bismarck”), a person who carried the determination of the national revolutionary era into the new and complicated conditions of the modern Bulgarian state. He was a tyrant, but the forging of modern states is accompanied by violence everywhere in the world. He was a Russophobe, but he had no pathological hatred toward Russia and maintained a positive attitude toward the Russian people. Furthermore, the Russian tsar, Alexander III was one of the darkest historical figures. Least justified is the assertion by others that Stambolov betrayed Bulgaria’s interests to foreign powers—he was a “tough politician” for his protectors Austria-Hungary and Great Britain and the first to put the relations between a Balkan country and the European powers on equal footing while constantly affirming his autonomy and the national

⁸⁷ Trendafil Mitev, “Stefan Stambolov i bŭlgarskiyat natsionalen vŭpros ot Osvobozhdenieto do 1894 g.” (Stefan Stambolov and the Bulgarian national question from the Liberation to 1894), *Voennoistoricheski sbornik* 52, no. 1 (1983): 35–50.

⁸⁸ *Stefan Stambolov—revolyutsioner i knizhovnik. Materiali ot natsionalnata sesiya, provedena na 5 dekemvri 1984* (Stefan Stambolov—revolutionary and man of letters. Materials from the national session on December 5, 1984) (Veliko Tŭrnovo, 1987). About the conference in the memoirs of the chairperson, see Ilcho Dimitrov, *Vsichko teche*, 232–233.

interests. He brought to the Bulgarian throne Ferdinand, from whom many evils ensued, but there were no other candidates, and Bulgaria desperately needed a prince in those troubled times; besides, he could not foresee how the prince would evolve. In fact, Ferdinand stood in the shadow during Stambolov's rule, and only after Stambolov was succeeded by the "political nonentities and courtiers" who criticized him was the prince able to establish his "personal regime." More justified are the moral accusations against Stambolov for executing some of his old brothers-in-arms (in the Russophile military riots in 1887), but had they succeeded, they would have done the same with him. A final argument: if Stambolov had lived until the Balkan Wars, he would hardly have allowed the country's adversaries to outwit Bulgaria.⁸⁹

At the same conference Trendafil Mitev enumerated Stambolov's multiple attempts at compromise and agreement with Russia, including a willingness to work toward Prince Ferdinand's removal from the throne, as a proof of a parallel "realistic tendency" in relations between the two states.⁹⁰ Another author examined relations with Austria-Hungary during Stambolov's rule and concluded that even when they were closest, contradictions remained in the economic sphere and on the Macedonian question, and that "there was no element of subordination of the weaker side, in contrast to the relations between Serbia of Prince Milan and Austria-Hungary."⁹¹

Taking a considerably different tack from the above authors is Konstantin Kosev. According to his paper, in the beginning Stambolov appeared to be an ardent advocate of the democratic and progressive ideals of the national Revival, but later on he became an absolute ruler with promonarchist leanings. In fending off Russia he looked for support from "doubtful allies," namely the Western states and especially Great Britain and Austria-Hungary, who like Russia pursued self-interested goals, though in a more surreptitious way. Thus paradoxically, "the worst enemies of Russia and of the Bulgarian people, the main perpetrators of Bul-

⁸⁹ Andrei Pantev, "Vidyan otblizo i dalech" (Seen from close-up and from afar), in *Stefan Stambolov—revolyutsioner i knizhovnik*, 17–27.

⁹⁰ Trendafil Mitev, "Nyakoi nedootseneni aspekti na bŭlgaro-ruskite politicheski otnosheniya prez perioda na Stambolovoto upravlenie" (Some underestimated aspects of Bulgarian-Russian political relations during Stambolov's rule), in *Stefan Stambolov—revolyutsioner i knizhovnik*, 53–59.

⁹¹ Radoslav Mishev, "Stefan Stambolov i bŭlgaro-avstro-ungarskite otnosheniya (1886–1894)" (Stefan Stambolov and Bulgarian-Austro-Hungarian relations, 1886–1894), in *Stefan Stambolov—revolyutsioner i knizhovnik*, 68–79 (citation on 79).

garia's dismemberment [at the Congress of Berlin], the real authors of the political crisis in the principality, presented themselves as allies and well-wishers." But "one evil does not come alone." Stambolov decided that a prince should be elected immediately, whoever he might be, and thus "thoughtlessly contributed to the enthronement of the ill-fated Ferdinand." The latter played an especially "evil role," as he "sacrificed Bulgaria to German imperialism" and led the country to two national catastrophes. Kosev admits that Stambolov was a sincere patriot and was not motivated by blind hatred toward Russia or the Russian people. But his policies proved "fatal" and had "tragic consequences," because Bulgaria's break with its liberator pushed the country to a rapprochement with the Western states, which over time proved to be "much more dangerous for the national independence of Bulgaria." In spite of his errors and delusions, he acted "for the realization of the bourgeois revolution and the strengthening of capitalism in Bulgaria" (meant positively, though couched in Marxist dogma) and was one of the "most prominent and active architects" of modern Bulgaria. Yet the dictatorship he established "in its nature and objective results was a dictatorship of the emerging commercial-industrial bourgeoisie from the era of the so-called initial accumulation of capital" (meant in a negative sense).⁹²

Finally, in yet another interpretative move at the conference, Ilcho Dimitrov treated Stambolov's rule in terms of democracy versus dictatorship. Dimitrov distanced himself from the "cult of the strong personalities" (exemplified by the mythologization of Stambolov) and stated his sympathy for statesmen such as Petko Karavelov—committed democrats who preferred "slower, but deeper change" and who wanted to solve social problems with democratic means and in accordance with the prevailing social sentiments. In his view, with a democratic form of rule as applied by Karavelov, one could achieve similar or better results. Stambolov's rule is then assessed from this (democratic) point of view to show the other side of the coin, including his trampling upon the national revolutionaries' ideal of a democratic, liberal state by establishing a dictatorship and persecuting political enemies who, just like him, believed they were fulfilling their duty to their country.

Dimitrov then touches upon relations with tsarist Russia, pointing to the difficulties in objectively judging Stambolov's deeds in this respect,

⁹² Konstantin Kosev, "Stefan Stambolov—revolyutsioner i dŭrzhavnik" (Stefan Stambolov—revolutionary and statesman), in *Stefan Stambolov—revolyutsioner i knizhovnik*, 7–16, citations on 12, 14, 15.

not least because of the influence of the present and the identification of Russia with the Soviet Union. He accepts blaming tsarist Russia (and of Tsar Alexander III) for the turn in relations, but opines that Bulgaria's interests in realizing its national program dictated that it rely on Russia in its efforts to reach the Straits (and to take advantage of Russia's policies), notwithstanding the blunders of Alexander III, instead of looking for support for the national cause from the major Western powers. The break of 1886 was harmful for Bulgaria, even if Stambolov acted out of the best patriotic motives, because the direction he gave to Bulgarian politics "was one of the preconditions for the defeat of Bulgaria at the beginning of the following century," and (the defeats of) 1913 and 1918 are proof that the course embarked upon in 1886 was wrong.⁹³ We see here a very sophisticated version of an anti-Stambolovist (Russophile) account, in which he is granted some credit only to be accused all the more heavily on the main points. This strategy is all the more effective as it is seemingly balanced (not overtly partisan), and the link between Stambolov and the heavy consequences ascribed to him remains vague to the degree of insinuation. This shows, among other things, that a work can be balanced, well-reasoned, and nicely phrased, yet still be biased and partisan.

Dimitrov further elaborated his views in an essay titled "A Deed of Pure Persons" (1987), dedicated to the 100th anniversary of the Russophile military riots in Russe. In a narrower sense this work presents a "justification" of the executed Russophile officers who organized the plot against Stambolov (including some former associates of his). The justification assumes various forms. The officers, like other Russophile enemies of Stambolov, were guided by national, patriotic motives; moreover, they expressed the prevalent Russophile public feelings of the times. The victors accused them of being tools of a foreign power, and not of just any power, but of the liberator Russia, even though they too relied on foreign support to maintain their rule. Dimitrov appeals to "historical practice" or "which line came to be historically justified by subsequent developments" to demonstrate that, although defeated at the time, they were right (and acquitted by history) because the Russophile tendency won in the end, though much later. By executing them, Stambolov created a dangerous precedent of political murders, the shedding

⁹³ Ilcho Dimitrov, "Zaklyuchitelni dumi" (Concluding words), in *Stefan Stambolov—revolyutsioner i knizhovnik*, 173–183. In fact, the causal link has to be demonstrated, and the burden of proof falls upon those who assert it.

of Bulgarian blood by Bulgarians, that would be repeated again and again in 1923, 1925, and in the Macedonian vendetta: “this whole series had its sad debut in February 1887.”⁹⁴ The only thing these heterogeneous massacres have in common is that they were committed by Bulgarians against Bulgarians. Yet Dimitrov somehow implicates Stambolov by repeatedly linking the massacres with his initial act of brutality and implying causation.

There is something sympathetic (and noble) in a historiographical defense of a “lost cause” (of the Russophile rebels against Stambolov) as well as the previous defense of democracy (of Karavelov). However, by that time Stambolov had not yet won his cause in historiography (despite being victorious in that event in history), at least not officially.⁹⁵ Ironically, Ilcho Dimitrov would garner more sympathy in the then-unforeseeable future after the fall of communism, when Stambolov would be entirely vindicated and glorified from a national (and pointedly nationalist) perspective, so that his opponents would need the intercession of History, i.e., of the historians.

Ilcho Dimitrov then elaborates the ideas that Bulgaria’s actual and permanent interests were connected with Russia independent of personalities (like Alexander III) and of circumstances; that the deeds of Stambolov after 1886 cannot be understood and still less justified because Russia did not want to create a “trans-Danubian province,” but preferred a loyal Bulgarian head of state (!) and a loyal government, headed by a Russian general (!) or by a Bulgarian like Dragan Tsankov; that in the relations between “big” and “small,” the national honor should not consist of a display of “braggadocio,” but in realism and an awareness of one’s place; that only Russia could support national unification, which was a widely shared view, and that is why Stambolov had to resort to dictatorship. Finally, and especially important, is the idea that Stambolov’s reorientation

⁹⁴ Ilcho Dimitrov, “Delo na chisti hora,” 90–91.

⁹⁵ In his memoirs Ilcho Dimitrov affirms that toward 1984 Stambolov was already vindicated not only among the broad public, but among the party leadership. See Ilcho Dimitrov, *Vsichko teche*, 232–233. According to him Stambolov was especially admired for his courage in opposing the Russian tsar. Niko Yakhiel (adviser to the head of the party and the state Todor Zhivkov) also attests in his memoirs that Zhivkov did not hide his admiration for Stambolov, both for his independent policies and his authoritarian methods of rule. See Niko Yakhiel, *Todor Zhivkov i lichnata vlast. Spomeni. Dokumenti. Analizi* (Todor Zhivkov and the one-person rule. Memoirs. Documents. Analyses) (Sofia: M-8-M, 1997), 227. If such sentiments existed, they could not be manifested under a pro-Soviet regime and under the surveillance of Moscow.

of Bulgarian foreign policy “predetermined” the subsequent defeats, that the national catastrophe of 1918 was a catastrophe of the Liberal parties, successors of the course of 1886. In conclusion: the Russe riot was not the deed of a few adventurers or paid Russian tools, but of patriots who died for Bulgaria. They were guided by a correct understanding of the road to the national ideal. The attitude toward Russia derives from this insofar as the Bulgarian struggle for freedom and national unification coincided with the interests of Russia in the Balkans—in this sense “the Russophiles in their intentions and goals are first and foremost Bulgarophiles.”⁹⁶ This is the most elaborate construction in equating Russian with Bulgarian interests, where the pro-Russian Bulgarians are the real and best patriots. Notable here is also the way bad consequences from Stambolov’s policies are prefigured and insinuated.

Stambolov and relations with Russia continued to occupy Ilcho Dimitrov’s attention in his introduction to Simeon Radev’s *The Builders of Modern Bulgaria* (republished only in 1990) and in other works. His Russophile judgments and convictions will not be repeated here; we will note only that they were increasingly presented as truth and wisdom that the Bulgarian nation acquired through experience and suffering. More interesting is the argument why Stambolov’s Russophobe policies, generalized as a long-term direction and impetus of Bulgarian foreign policy, were not justified, but were repudiated over time. To begin with, after the break with Bulgaria, Russia redirected itself to Serbia as its stronghold in the Balkans; even after the restoration of relations, Bulgaria’s “privileged status” vis-à-vis Russia was not restored, but taken by Serbia. The Balkan Alliance under the auspices of Russia was the apex of the repaired relations, but Serbia still had priority for Russia. The catastrophe of 1913 (in the Inter-Allied War) was due not to the fact that the Balkan Alliance was unnatural or unfavorable for Bulgaria, but to the alliance’s breakdown, in which anti-Russian forces took the upper hand; Ferdinand’s ambition to take Istanbul also contributed to Russian hesitation. The first national catastrophe predetermined Bulgaria’s entry in World War I against Russia and its allies, and thus also predetermined the second national catastrophe.⁹⁷ Thus Russophilia was “justified” by history: first in the liberation

⁹⁶ Ilcho Dimitrov, “Delo na chisti hora,” 98–113, esp. 90, 106, 108, 111–112.

⁹⁷ Ilcho Dimitrov, “Za ‘Stroitelite na sŭvremenna Bŭlgariya’ i epokhata, otrazena ot Simeon Radev” (About “The builders of contemporary Bulgaria” and the era reflected by Simeon Radev), in Ilcho Dimitrov, *Ochevidtsi i izsledvachi* (Witnesses and researchers) (Sofia: Universitetsko izdatelstvo “Sv. Kliment Okhridski,” 2005), 78–93, esp. 84–

by Russia and the Russian help in building up the state and then again in World War II. Conversely, the Russophobe belief in accomplishing national unification with the help of the West was not confirmed (“justified”) by history: it went bankrupt with Bulgaria’s participation in the anti-Russian bloc in World War I—the defeat in 1918 may be taken as a consequence of the trend initiated in 1886–1887.⁹⁸ The cause-effect reasoning will be covered in greater detail later on. Suffice it to note here the arbitrary derivation of subsequent events from previous ones, in which the particular circumstances are ignored and the favored “ideal” links stand out. In a sort of Russophile “philosophy of history,” the pro-Russian and anti-Russian orientations feature as deeper (in fact, metaphysical, supra-empirical) “causes” that condition the course of Bulgarian history. There is an overdetermination by preconceived ideas not born out of actual facts. For example, while it is true that Bulgaria was in the defeated bloc in World War I, this is hardly due to the fact that Russia was in the opposite alliance (of which it was actually the weakest link).

Here is the place to systematize the various positions on Stambolov’s foreign policy regarding the “national question.” Two aspects of the problem should be clearly distinguished (which is rarely done in historiography): first, the (de facto) national independence (it was attained de jure in 1908), and second, the task of unification (the union with Macedonia and Eastern Thrace). Something was already said in this essay on the issue of the national independence that engendered the famous “philes/phobes” confrontation. The question has a factual side: did Russia really pose a danger, and if so, exactly what kind of danger was it (in the spectrum from imposing a pro-Russian government to a Russian occupation and direct Russian rule)? As we have seen, most historians think that a danger really existed and that Stambolov asserted national independence and achieved state sovereignty. There is also the opposite view (mostly in the 1950s) that the danger was a sham and served as a pretext for Stambolov to establish a dictatorship. The danger itself, if admitted at all by these historians, is belittled: not occupation, but the establishment of a pro-Russian regime, or (euphemistically) that Bulgaria should be a “friendly country.” In addi-

85, 88, 91–92 (initially published in 1990 as the introduction to Simeon Radev’s book); Ilcho Dimitrov, “Stambolov i stambolovizmūt” (Stambolov and Stambolovism), in Ilcho Dimitrov, *Ochevidtsi i razkazvachi*, 94–107, esp. 96–97, 103–107. Russophilia and Russophobia are traced all the way to World War II in the form of the pro-Soviet course of the Bulgarian Communist Party and the pro-German course of the rulers.

⁹⁸ Ilcho Dimitrov, “Za ‘Stroitelite na sūvremenna,’” 91–92; Ilcho Dimitrov, “Stambolov i stambolovizmūt,” 103–104.

tion, some assert that in his opposition to Russia, Stambolov did not achieve independence, but actually subordinated the country to the Western great powers. In fact, the evidence from the era seems to indicate that Bulgaria's independence was endangered by Russia (though this cannot be tackled here). Though this is not the point here, I personally agree with the historians who do not think that there was a danger of direct Russian occupation, at least because of the expected counteraction of the other great powers; the best solution for Russia would have been to impose a pro-Russian government that would stay under Russian influence and serve as an instrument of its Balkan policies.

To the factual side of the problem, a value aspect is imperceptibly added, and both actually merge. The question becomes: how bad was Russian influence after all? Stambolov's position—independent of the degree of danger—was a manifestation of national self-confidence and pride and a degree of national touchiness. The historians who defend this position, for their part, take state and national sovereignty seriously. The “anti-Stambolovists” among the contemporaries and the historians do not see subordination to Russia as that bad or bad at all, especially as Russia liberated Bulgaria (and subjugation to the Soviet Union had become habitual under communism). Much worse from this point is the dependence on other powers. However, this cannot be stated directly without showing indifference to national ideas and values: the communists, who accused their opponents of “Great Bulgarian nationalism” and “chauvinism,” would later be blamed for “national nihilism.” As a rule even the hard-line communist authors of the 1950s were not immune to a touch of nationalism and felt obliged to seek other arguments for their anti-Stambolovist stance: the alleged fabrication of the Russian danger, the class nature of the rule as (anti-people) dictatorship of the big bourgeoisie, the then-incriminating subjugation to Western powers. In time Bulgarian historians (along with the communist regime itself) returned to nationalism, which is not only a tradition of the historical scholarship in Bulgaria (as elsewhere), but seems to be the “natural” standpoint in a purely political national history. Thus the above anti-Stambolovist arguments became unconvincing and insufficient.

By assuming the national viewpoint, historians faced the question (and the more nationalist-minded the historian, the more so) of how to harmonize nationalism with Russophilia and anti-Stambolovism, given the fact that writers of popular history like Simeon Radev had turned Stambolov into an emblem of the national idea and statehood. It is here that the second aspect of the national question comes into play—national unification. Stambolov is

blamed (first by Hristo Hristov) for mistaken policies regarding Macedonia, namely acting by peaceful means (church and schools) through a rapprochement with Turkey (an age-old enemy) and restraining the armed bands (*cheti*). However, such an attempt by Orthodox Marxists to supersede the nationalists in nationalism is not only historically implausible (because Stambolov had a long-term strategy), but lacks credibility. Another more indirect and more plausible argument was needed.

Such an argument is the assertion (actually made before the communists by Ivan Panayotov in 1941) that it was precisely cooperation with Russia (notwithstanding the restriction of independence and sovereignty) that favored “objectively” the solution of the national question, because only Russia could help in this endeavor, while the Western powers were firmly against it. Hence challenging Russia in asserting national sovereignty led to a loss of the “natural” ally in the unification effort, which in the end turned out to be counterproductive and shortsighted. In other words, national unification is used as a trump that overrides national independence, so that Stambolov’s policies prove to be dubious and counterproductive precisely from a national point of view. It is interesting to what extent even strongly and sincerely nationalist authors identified themselves with the pro-Russian position (as other Bulgarian nationalists probably identified with Germany, which helped achieve temporary Bulgarian unification in World War II).

But is it true that Stambolov’s policies had the fateful and disastrous consequences on the national question that are ascribed to them? This question should be divided in two. First: what were Russia’s Balkan policies after Stambolov, concerning Macedonia in particular, and why? Second: did the break with Russia during Stambolov’s rule influence Russia’s attitude to Bulgaria during the Balkan wars and “lead” to the national catastrophe? It is indicative that, on these most important questions, there were only opinions, not analyses or evidence-based inferences. While the communist regime lasted, the opinions were against Stambolov. The authors affirmed that as a consequence of Stambolov’s policies, Russia turned toward Serbia (after Serbia escaped the influence of Austria-Hungary) instead of relying on the “ungrateful” and unruly Bulgarians. Before 1989 only Andrei Pantev objected (in passing) to blaming Stambolov for “almost all foreign political follies of the Bulgarian bourgeoisie,” but he also accepted the thesis of fateful consequences.⁹⁹ As will be seen, things changed after the fall of communism.

⁹⁹ Andrei Pantev, “Vidyan otblizo,” 17.

In 1984 one of the best works on Stambolov's era was published by Stoicho Grüncharov. I will address in more detail the important points on the issues that concern us here. To begin with, in this work the roots of the deterioration of Bulgarian-Russian relations appear as early as 1881, when the new Russian tsar, Alexander III interrupted the liberalization process of his predecessor. Instead of relying on the natural (democratic) development of the Bulgarian nation and on the "moral" Russian influence, he wanted to see the monarch as a dominant political factor; hence he gave Prince Battenberg support in suspending the constitution. The Russian tsar, with his absolutist mentality, underestimated Bulgarians' democratic leanings. Thus the tsar did not understand the failure of Battenberg's "regime of credentials" (in which Russian generals participated) but interpreted it as an attempt to eliminate Russian influence in Bulgaria and re-orient the country toward hostile powers. In the Union as well, he saw just the personal and anti-Russian purposes of the Bulgarian prince, but not the role of the broader Bulgarian public, and he decided to dethrone the prince precisely when the strongest Bulgarian party with a pro-Russian orientation was in office.¹⁰⁰

Russia's attitude aggravated domestic political struggles, and in 1886 the Bulgarian politicians grouped themselves around the two poles of the dilemma posed to them: with Battenberg against Russia or with Russia without Battenberg. The extreme nationalists (or political Russophobes) were represented by the group of Zakhari Stoyanov (including Dimitür Rizov and Dimitür Petkov), the Liberals from Southern Bulgaria (the former Eastern Rumelia), and the adherents of Vasil Radoslavov. The extreme Russophiles consisted of Dragan Tsankov's party and of the so-called pseudo-Unionists from Southern Bulgaria. The third position—with Battenberg and with Russia—was represented by the party of Petko Karavelov. Developments, however, took a different course (which had no adherents at the time): without Battenberg and without Russia. Stoicho Grüncharov emphasizes (against the social class vulgate) that parties did not align neatly with sections of the bourgeoisie and that the links between them were loose and relative. Then he describes convincingly the separate political groupings. Zakhari Stoyanov and the people around him were principally motivated by extreme nationalism and, following from this, by monarchism and political Russophobia. They thought they represented the

¹⁰⁰ Stoicho Grüncharov, *Politicheskite sili i monarkhicheskiyat institut v Bŭlgariya 1886–1894* (The political forces and the institute of the monarchy in Bulgaria, 1886–1894) (Sofia: Nauka i izkustvo, 1984), 18–22.

entire nation and “monopolized the right to dispense political justice with a certainty in their own infallibility.” They also used violence against their political adversaries (whom they called “traitors,” “black souls,” and “ruble-takers”), which foreshadowed the “terroristic features of the approaching dictatorship.” Vasil Radoslavov and the people around him were also nationalists, but of a different kind—unscrupulous opportunists—and he himself was a typical leader of a coterie. The Russophile “parties” also differed from one another. Most extreme was Dragan Tsankov and his supporters, who urged Russia to occupy Bulgaria. Petko Karavelov followed a compromise and “opportunistic” line and sought a solution of the conflict with Russia while preserving independence and sovereignty; that is why he was accused by the Russophiles of being against Russia and by the Russophobes of hesitation and spinelessness. His policies were appropriate in principle, but inapplicable in the sharp crisis, which demanded extreme measures. Yet his indecision was a “rare example of conscientiousness and responsibility for the fate of the people and the state.” As Grüncharov notes, the mass of the Bulgarian people remained passive and did not follow either of the extreme trends, though both claimed to speak in its name (thus rejecting indirectly the assertions of some historians that “the people” were entirely on the side of the Russophiles).¹⁰¹

Also worth mentioning is the socio-psychological description of the former revolutionaries (such as Stefan Stambolov and Zakhari Stoyanov). They were formed in a revolutionary era (before the liberation), which created monolithic personalities because of the clarity of goals and ideals and also due to the extraordinary mobilization and strain. Yet Grüncharov asserts a logic and continuity in the development of Stambolov’s and Zakhari Stoyanov’s political ideas and personalities before and after the liberation (implicitly against the thesis of the “ideological turn”). Grüncharov explains the establishment of the dictatorship by citing the confrontation with Russia (and the resulting lack of wide popular support) and the propensity of some revolutionaries to evolve in critical conditions into dictators. This is facilitated by previously formed personal qualities such as determination, firmness, self-confidence, and strong convictions, which can easily turn into self-assertion, brutality, self-righteousness, and belief in one’s exceptionality. In addition, a “classical” means for installing a dictatorship was the propaganda (especially by Zakhari Stoyanov) of a mission to “rescue the nation” and the attempt to mobilize the population itself in the dictatorial mechanism through the local bands called

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 22–43, 85.

“Bulgaria for Herself.” This presented a kind of “primitive application of totalitarianism in politics,” to judge from their black-and-white logic (“those not with us are against us”) and their hostility towards parties (“there are no parties, only Bulgarians”).¹⁰²

The enthroning of Prince Ferdinand and the Russophobe solution of the crisis stabilized the situation, though there were renewed moments of crisis until 1896. In Grüncharov’s assessment, Bulgaria became associated with forces with which it had no foreign policy goals in common. At the same time Bulgaria broke with the state “which, according to the objective logic of historical development, had interests in tandem with Bulgaria.”¹⁰³ (But he does not go so far as to affirm that this thwarted the solving of the national question or even that it affected it unfavorably.) Traditional popular feelings toward Russia could not be erased and fueled political Russo-philial. Still, conditions were created that allowed for the more normal functioning of the state apparatus and for improvements to the economy, education, and other fields. Stambolov can be credited with the building of railways and ports, concluding of trade agreements, support for the credit institutions and the joint-stock companies, the urbanization of the capital city, a good law on education, and the setting up of a university, all of which prepared the conditions for the economic boom at the beginning of the twentieth century. But the dictatorship was maintained by persecuting political enemies while the conspiracies and assaults continued, which created societal tensions. Stambolov became trapped in the cycle of repression (already described by previous authors) that called forth reaction. And he was increasingly out of touch with reality, insisting on the existence of an external danger and unable to discern the change in the international situation that precipitated his fall. According to Grüncharov, Stambolov’s dictatorship put a “durable and unfortunate stamp” on Bulgarian bourgeois democracy and political ethics. There were abnormal relations between government and opposition, crude political moeurs and political intolerance, unscrupulous press, election violence, and the sidelining of the National Assembly.¹⁰⁴

Before the end of the communist regime, a few more publications appeared that are worthy of mention. Andrei Pantev (in the steps of Ivan Panayotov) addressed the geopolitical and strategic dimensions of the “Bulgarian question” during the break with Russia (1886–1896). While

¹⁰² Ibid., 58–60, 84–87.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 109.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 107–109, 156–157, 174, 188–189, 194–197, 200–201.

there is little new in the presentation of the international situation and its dynamics, the assessment of Bulgaria's involvement in international politics (of which Pantev is patriotically proud) deserves attention in this analysis. It is entirely negative. According to Pantev, Britain's support for Bulgaria against Russia (called "insidious," "political bargaining," and "irresponsible adventurism") did not advance the Bulgarian national cause in Macedonia in any way. Moreover, it overshadowed and substituted the real contents of the national question (i.e., national unification) with "insignificant, transitory, and ambiguous contents," so that the "Bulgarian question" was reduced to a meaningless conflict of a small state with a powerful empire. Pantev says there was a "historical alignment of the strategic interests of Russia and the Bulgarian national liberation movement" (in contrast to the different goals and potential of Great Britain in the Balkans) and that political estrangement from Russia was dangerous and carried with it "far-reaching historical consequences."¹⁰⁵

One detailed work on the diplomatic relations between Austria-Hungary and Bulgaria from the liberation (1878) to 1894, by Radoslav Mishev, can be seen as a rebuttal of the old Stalinist thesis about Stambolov's "Austrophilia." According to Mishev, from the moment when Prince Battenberg effected a coup d'état and established his "regime of credentials" on April 27, 1881, Austria-Hungary was trying to worsen Bulgarian-Russian relations and to replace Russian influence with its own. However, there is no evidence of a preliminary coordination between Bulgaria and Austria-Hungary in proclaiming the Union. On the contrary, Austria-Hungary tried to hamper the unification movement and, faced with a fait accompli, urged Serbia to attack Bulgaria (and rescued Serbia after the failure). In 1886–1887 Austria-Hungary took off its mask of collegiality toward Russia (in the League of the Three Emperors, *Dreikaiserbund*) and undertook an offensive against Russian positions in Bulgaria by supporting the choice of Ferdinand as prince of Bulgaria and acting for his recognition (though without success). But Austria-Hungary's support did not extend to the Macedonian question; in fact, it was the strongest adversary of the Bulgarian national cause, because it feared that a big Slav state in the Balkans would serve as a center of gravity and an inspiring example for the Slav nationalities in the empire itself. For its part, Bulgaria, in spite

¹⁰⁵ Andrei Pantev, "Strategicheski izmereniya na Bŭlgarskiya vŭpros 1886–1896 godina" (Strategic dimensions of the Bulgarian question, 1886–1896), *Voennoistoricheski sbornik* 56, no. 4 (1987): 90–109, esp. 90–91, 94–97, 102–103, 109; the assessments on 95–96, 102–103.

of small concessions, was not a passive object of the Western powers' political manipulation in general, but tried to maneuver between them in order to achieve results on the national question. Stambolov proved to be a "difficult person" for Austro-Hungarian diplomacy, and even though Bulgaria was a weaker state, there was no element of subordination in the bilateral relations (unlike in the relations between Austria-Hungary and Serbia during King Milan's reign).¹⁰⁶

It should be noted that Petko Karavelov is an especially sympathetic figure with Russophile historians, because he was a moderate alternative to the Russophobes (unlike Dragan Tsankov), but also because he tried to combine patriotism with a pro-Russian course (same as the Russophile historians) and as an adversary of the dictatorship and advocate of democracy. He is, in a sense, perfectly politically correct. According to Dimitŭr Sazdov, although the position of the Russophiles of Karavelov for "independence in domestic affairs and friendship with Russia" could not assert itself, it was the "most realistic" position (!) and an expression of great responsibility to the people and the state; it raised itself above political "conjuncture" and the errors of the Russian government in the name of the state's foreign political objectives.¹⁰⁷ Notable here is also the use of historiographical clichés worked out by previous authors as a (supposedly immediate) description of the situation, creating a somewhat comic effect. With other historians as well, one can observe the confusing of historiographically "wise" accounts, informed by "background" knowledge (including of the future) and theoretical abstractions with "simple" descriptions of the historical realities themselves.

As one of the most prominent Russophobes (and an extremely talented author), Zakhari Stoyanov continued to attract attention. There is typically an ambivalent attitude toward him: recognition of his great literary talent (especially as the author of *Notes on the Bulgarian Uprisings*, the most popular book on the major Bulgarian uprising against the Ottomans), his merits for the Union, but a rejection of his position and activities thereafter. Various authors find different degrees of negative and positive in him. Thus in a book on Zakhari Stoyanov's "Notes," the writer Efrem Karanfilov stresses the positive and noble as his permanent "character," while

¹⁰⁶ Radoslav Mishev, *Avstro-Ungariya i Bŭlgariya 1879–1894. Politicheski otnosheniya* (Austro-Hungary and Bulgaria, 1879–1894. Political relations) (Sofia: Izdatelstvo na OF, 1988), 299–310.

¹⁰⁷ Dimitŭr Sazdov, "Liberalite-karavelisti prez Stamboloviya rezhim" (The Liberals of Karavelov during Stambolov's regime), *Vekove* 15, no. 2 (1986): 33–44, esp. 33, 35.

his change of heart and some negative traits (such as vindictiveness in persecuting enemies, and rejection of old friends) are attributed to Stoyanov's letting power go to his head.¹⁰⁸ Conversely, the militant communist journalist Vladimir Topencharov stresses the negative aspects of Zakhari Stoyanov's "metamorphosis." Furthermore, he sees them not as a change in Stoyanov's character, but as a betrayal of principles and ideals: from service of the people, democratic convictions, and republicanism toward nationalism at the service of the bourgeoisie, monarchism, Russophobia, and attacks against socialism, all this accompanied by a deterioration of his personality and talent.¹⁰⁹ This dogmatic author sees Stoyanov's transformation as epitomizing the transformation of the bourgeoisie itself from progressive, when leading the people in the struggle for national independence and against feudalism, to regressive and anti-democratic, when defending the existing bourgeois domination of the people, who favored democracy and socialism. There were thus "two persons" expressing different social currents, and Topencharov warns against mixing them up and putting the bad one together with the good one in an "ideological hodgepodge" of the supposedly "whole" Zakhari Stoyanov.¹¹⁰

In a 1985 work Ilcho Dimitrov also touched upon the ideological and political development of Zakhari Stoyanov. He acknowledges Stoyanov's powerful talent as a writer (the "immortal" *Notes on the Bulgarian Uprisings*) and his achievements in the ideological preparation of the Union—hence his place in the pantheon of great Bulgarians. But concerning the last four years of Stoyanov's life (from 1885 to 1889), Dimitrov says that he would prefer not to have read some works by him and about him. Zakhari Stoyanov embraced the Russophobe cause, which contradicted the feelings and convictions of the broadest masses of the people and was not historically justified.¹¹¹

The third volume of the trilogy on Zakhari Stoyanov by the literary scholar Todor Tashev attempts to vindicate precisely those years. This is a biography based "on the archives, newspapers, books, legends, rumors,

¹⁰⁸ Efrem Karanfilov, *Nai-bŭlgarskoto vreme. Kniga za "Zapiskite" na Zakhari Stoyanov* (The most Bulgarian times. A book on the "Notes" of Zakhari Stoyanov) (Sofia: Bŭlgarski pisatel, 1979), esp. 40, 44.

¹⁰⁹ Vladimir Topencharov, *Bŭlgarskata zhurnalistika 1885–1903* (Bulgarian journalism, 1885–1903) (Sofia: Nauka i izkustvo, 1983), 47–51, 98–108.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 104–108.

¹¹¹ Ilcho Dimitrov, "Kŭm ideinoto i politicheskoto razvitie na Zakhari Stoyanov sled Osвобождението" (On the ideological and political evolution of Zakhari Stoyanov after the liberation), in *Zakhari Stoyanov i Sŭedinenieto* (Ruse, 1986), 5–27.

and slander” by an admiring author who identifies strongly with his hero.¹¹² One review, which typified the reaction to the book, recognized some strengths of the work but criticized it for whitewashing the image of Stoyanov and distorting or ignoring some aspects of his activities. These include the “ideological retreat” from democratic ideas and from the defense of the poor and his evolution toward monarchism and Russophobia; his negative attitude towards “nihilism,” socialism, and the Russian emigrants; his attacks against Petko Karavelov, Dimitŭr Blagoev, and others, and his brutal and obscurantist attitude toward his adversaries (whom he castigated as “black souls” and “traitors”); and finally, his contribution to “whitewashing a tyrannical regime” and even a “terroristic regime.”¹¹³

To sum up, the vindication of Stambolov and his rule started under communism and advanced, but with limits. He was recognized as a “strong personality” (and secretly admired as such). He was also recognized as an energetic modernizer of the country. He was (implicitly) recognized as a great statesman who also raised the country’s international prestige. But as a matter of principle, he could not be vindicated until the end of the communist regime—not on the two major counts: his anti-Russian foreign policy and the dictatorship. In foreign policy some successes were recognized, especially the promotion of the national cause in Macedonia by peaceful means. But his most important accomplishment—steering the right course for solving the national question—was denied; moreover, his policies were accused of having tragic consequences. Still, Stambolov remained popular and attractive for the broader public. He was admired in secret (even in the highest party circles) for his daring to challenge Russia, in contrast to the subservient communist regime in Bulgaria.

After the Fall of the Communist Regime

As can be expected, the fall of the communist regime and the emancipation from Soviet/Russian dependence accelerated and completed the reinterpretation of Stambolov’s regime. The main figure in this process was Andrei Pantev, who had embarked upon this road since 1981. His several rather polemical interventions in the theme will be noted before this essay

¹¹² Todor Tashev, *Zhivotŭt na letopisetsa* (The life of the chronicler), vol. 3 (Plovdiv: Hristo G. Danov, 1989), citation on 6.

¹¹³ Evlogi Buzhashki, “Poslednata kniga ot ‘Zhivotŭt na letopisetsa’” (The last book from “The life of the chronicler”), *Vekove* 19, no. 4 (1990), 90–96.

proceeds to other authors. In his introduction to a volume of memoirs of Stambolov's contemporaries (some of which are very negative), Pantev directly confronts the questions of his dictatorship and his foreign policy. His arguments do not purport to reject the dictatorship but to explain and "justify" it with circumstances and to relativize it in some points. They run as follows: in times of crisis, there were dictatorships in the Western democracies as well. Stambolov acted in defense of the country's independence, and if we know today that there was no danger of Russian occupation, this was not known at the time (e.g., the arrival of the Russian war ships, the mission of Kaulbars). In any state the government would severely punish army plotters against it, as Stambolov did with the Russo-ophile rioters. Besides, independence comes first, also as a precondition for democracy: "before being democratic and prosperous, Bulgaria had to become independent even from her benefactors," and this is what Stambolov achieved. Most importantly, state consolidation and centralization is never accomplished without violence, and this is accepted as normal elsewhere, so it is naïve to blame him for hampering the democratic development of Bulgaria.¹¹⁴

As for the foreign policy in the same work (contrary to what Pantev himself previously affirmed): especially dubious is the supposition that Stambolov's policy harmed Bulgaria—that Russia grew angry with the Bulgarians because of Stambolov and that relations were ruined. In fact, Russia's estrangement from Bulgaria was caused by the new (geo)political situation and not by memories of Stambolov's defiance. Russia's policies on the Macedonian question remained the same even when extreme Russophile governments ruled in Bulgaria. And again, if Bulgaria had had politicians of Stambolov's caliber later on, the country would never have been defeated in the Balkan Wars. Pantev reaches new heights in the glorification of Stambolov. "Whatever one says of him is insufficient," says Pantev, calling Stambolov a "complex person" and (using oxymorons) "the personification of everything great and everything repulsive from those times," "everything best and everything worst in Bulgaria," and "most un-European in manners and most European in methods."

In another work (from 1992) Pantev adds new arguments to "justify" the dictatorship: it was "a reaction to the stubborn shortsightedness of

¹¹⁴ Andrei Pantev, "Nie i Stefan Stambolov" (We and Stefan Stambolov), in *Stefan Stambolov v spomenite na sŭvremennitsi* (Stefan Stambolov in the memoirs of contemporaries) (Sofia: Nauka i izkustvo, 1992), 7–35, esp. 8–10, 26–35, citation on 35.

Russian policies and diplomacy,” and there was no alternative short of capitulation. Stambolov’s famous (or infamous) phrase about ruling “according to inner conviction” should be understood not as the statement of an arrogant ruler (although he became increasingly assured of his infallibility) but as a repudiation of demagoguery and assuming responsibility in face of a deadly danger. Besides, Stambolov’s dictatorship was selective and did not affect education, culture, or the economy; it was also not directed against the socialists, who then were “comically few” and not subordinate to an external force. And again, the (dictatorial) regime is explained by the “imperative demands of every modernization,” the centralization of power is necessary for economic liberalism, while in a society unprepared for them, institutionalized civil freedoms hamper modernization and distort democratic institutions.

On Stambolov’s policies on the national question, in addition to what was said previously, he was for a “preliminary, careful, and sustained action of ethnic consolidation before any other forms and manifestations of the national-liberation movement in Macedonia and Adrianople Thrace,” and his refusal to partition the irredenta contained a message for the future politicians. The governments after Stambolov realized a creative continuity with his policies of “preliminary consolidation of the Bulgarian element in Macedonia” (and in the economic sphere). The reorientation of Russia towards Serbia as a strategic ally was not because Russia “got angry” with Stambolov, but because of the impending conflict with the German world. The next Russian emperor, Nicholas II, and the Austro-Hungarian Franz Joseph I reached an agreement in 1897 to “freeze” the national-liberation movements in the Balkans, which would last until 1908.¹¹⁵

The influence of the present in the interpretation of Stambolov (by Pantev) is noticeable in the foreshadowing of European integration: in Stambolov’s times Bulgaria became a different state and “set foot on the wide road of the European community of states,” while Stambolov himself became “a scapegoat of this impetuous, and thus not quite refined, striving for Europeanization.”¹¹⁶ In another work Stambolov’s regime is

¹¹⁵ Andrei Pantev, *Godini na demokratsiya?* (Years of democracy?) (Sofia: Edem 21, 1992), 91–100 (about Stambolov), 101–129 (after him).

¹¹⁶ Andrei Pantev, *Stefan Stambolov. V chasa na Bŭlgariya* (Stefan Stambolov. In the hour of Bulgaria) (Sofia: Edem, 1995), esp. 119–120. This work also repeats the arguments about the necessity of dictatorship for modernization (115, 117–118) and the policies toward Macedonia (96, 120, 124–125).

treated under the telling rubric “Between East and West,” with the idea that under Stambolov, Bulgaria started to become European in statehood, modernization, and other spheres.¹¹⁷

To sum up Pantev’s contribution after 1989: Stambolov’s dictatorship is qualified in a number of ways—forced upon him, selective, and so on. The dictatorship is more fundamentally “justified” by prioritizing independence and sovereignty (which were threatened) over democracy. It is “justified” in yet another way, with the idea that state building and modernization in a backward society cannot proceed without centralization and violence (and even require it); conversely, premature democratic freedoms would hamper modernization and distort democracy itself. Finally, Stambolov’s policies on the national question (Macedonia) were correct and far-sighted; in fact, they were the best strategy. Thus Stambolov is elevated to the position of greatest Bulgarian statesman and is also credited with Europeanization of the state and society.

The Russophilia and Russophobia of Stambolov’s times were reinterpreted by Radoslav Popov (in 1991), under the unmistakable influence of post-communist perspectives, as primarily a “struggle for power” (and economic benefits) between bourgeois parties and groups. While the purely pragmatic and selfish struggle for power is emphasized, the differences in foreign orientation are dismissed as just a “pretext.”¹¹⁸ Still Popov prefers, so to say, the “scoundrels” of the Russophile type to the other type. The strange-sounding argument is that the Russophile forces sought the protection of Russia “in view of guaranteeing the independence of the Principality of Bulgaria and the completion of national unification,” and it was “paradoxical” that exactly this political platform was judged by the Russophobes as national treason and sacrificing the independence of Bulgaria. In other words, Popov has internalized the communist-Russophile inversion of meanings so much that he is amazed that the historical actors might have viewed things differently. Otherwise, both political groups sought external support in fighting each other for power, while the “program for national unification was relegated to the background.” The resolution of the question of national unification was post-

¹¹⁷ Ivan Bozhilov, Vera Mutafchieva, Konstantin Kosev, Andrei Pantev, and Stoicho Grüncharov, *Istoriya na Bŭlgariya* (History of Bulgaria) (Sofia: Abagar, 1998), 263–320 (Pantev’s chapter), esp. 313, 319. On the whole Pantev follows his previous theses.

¹¹⁸ Radoslav Popov, *Bŭlgariya na krŭstopŭt. Regentstvo 1886–1887* (Bulgaria at a crossroads. The regency, 1886–1887) (Sofia: Universitetsko izdatelstvo “Sv. Kliment Okhridski,” 1991), 7, 497, 499, 501.

poned, and the Russophobes shortsightedly repelled the “most natural” political ally—Russia—a move that, in the end, led to national catastrophe in the wars.¹¹⁹ In his 2000 book, Popov is already not a Russophile, but neutral, and the book is written as if it were merely ascertaining a state of affairs without taking a side or a position.¹²⁰

The winds of change did not miss Zakhari Stoyanov. In 2000 a scholarly conference dedicated to the 150th anniversary of his birth took place. The materials are not very impressive, but what matters is that they are rehabilitative: they liberate him from the stigma of extreme Russophobia and emphasize his patriotism. Only Ilcho Dimitrov defended a modified version of some of his earlier views, namely about the “Bulgarian-Bulgarian war,” and Stoyanov’s deterioration during the last four years of his life. This deterioration, if not pardoned, is at least partly excused with the sincerity of his conviction that he fought the enemies of freedom and with his important role in the Union and as author of “one of the most Bulgarian books.” Dimitrov reaches an existential insight about the unity of personality beyond all contradictions and transformations: “Life is like a melody—if we extract a single note, the melody is spoiled. We have to accept not only what we like today.”¹²¹ One can compare this with the sharp split of Zakhari Stoyanov in two personalities, characteristic of the previous period. Applied reflexively to historiography, the “ideological turn” (and “split personality”) proves to be less in Zakhari Stoyanov (and the other former national revolutionaries) than a dividing line that historians draw in sorting out good from bad, determining which parts of the revolutionaries’ ideological stance can be accepted and which cannot.

Russia’s policies on the Macedonian question, from the restoration of relations with Bulgaria in 1896 until the wars, are revealed in newer works as generally negative, without this being connected to Stambolov and in spite of the strong Russophile gestures from the Bulgarian side. This was shown in a previously discussed work by Simeon Damyanov (who cannot be accused of sympathy for Stambolov). It has been demonstrated in more detail and sober analysis in Elena Statelova’s contribution to *History of Bulgarian Diplomacy, 1879–1913* (1994). Russian support

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 498–500, 505–506.

¹²⁰ Radoslav Popov, *Rusiya protiv Stambolov ili Stambolov protiv Rusiya* (Russia against Stambolov or Stambolov against Russia) (Sofia: Akademichno izdatelstvo “Prof. Marin Drinov,” 2000).

¹²¹ Ilcho Dimitrov, “Dvulikiyat Zakhari” (The two-faced Zakhari), in *Zakhari Stoyanov i nasheto vreme* (Zakhari Stoyanov and our times) (Sofia, 2000), 53–63, citation on 61.

for Serbian claims in Macedonia at the end of the nineteenth century (for an appointment of a Serbian bishop in Skopje) was due not to past resentment toward Bulgaria, but to the importance of Serbia as an ally against Austria-Hungary in the imminent conflict.¹²²

Russia's attitude towards Bulgaria during the Balkan Wars, the subject of so much research and speculation since the wars, was revisited and perhaps most adequately and precisely elucidated by Georgi Markov.¹²³ Leaving aside the multitude of facts and analyses of the political and diplomatic maneuvers and the course of military action, we are only interested in whether Markov sees a projection of "the shadow" of Stambolov in the Russian attitude towards Bulgaria, as affirmed or implied by the authors of the "fatal consequences" thesis. The answer is—not at all; there is no hint of that. In the complicated process of uncovering causes and allocating responsibility for what happened, Russia stands in the background. In the foreground are the maximalism of the Bulgarian leaders and the acting at cross-purposes by the king, government, diplomats, and the military; only then come the allies and the great powers. The influence of Russia (and of the other great powers) upon Bulgaria's military course, contrary to simplistic theories about agents and conspiracies, consisted of encouragements, restraints, and warnings, which served as signals in the entirely Bulgarian decision-making process. The overconfidence in the Russian arbitrage (over the "disputed zone" between Bulgaria and Serbia) was a mistake, but a Bulgarian one, committed by the strongly Russophile premier Stoyan Danev, who did not take actual Russian interests into account in spite of the Russian warnings. Serbia took priority for Russia because it was a more valuable ally against Austria-Hungary in a future conflict. Markov's perspective is generally neither Russophile nor Russophobe, but based on a sober analysis of interests.

More comprehensive ("synthetic") new works were produced by Stoicho Grüncharov and Elena Stelova, based on their previous studies and on those of other authors. While in the "new reading" of history the attitude toward Stambolov is generally positive, it is positive to different

¹²² Elena Stelova, Radoslav Popov, and Vasilka Tankova, *Istoriya na bŭlgarskata diplomatsiya 1879–1913* (History of Bulgarian diplomacy, 1879–1913) (Sofia: Fondatsiya "Otvoreno Obshtestvo," 1994), 377–491, esp. 474–485 (the chapter by Elena Stelova).

¹²³ Georgi Markov, *Bŭlgariya v Balkanskiya sŭyuz sreshtu Osmanskata imperiya, 1912–1913* (Bulgaria in the Balkan League against the Ottoman Empire, 1912–1913) (Sofia: Nauka i izkustvo, 1989); Georgi Markov, *Bŭlgarskoto krushenie 1913* (The Bulgarian collapse, 1913) (Sofia: Izdatelstvo na BAN, 1991), esp. 5–9, 226–228.

degrees and is critical on some points. In the new multi-volume academic *History of Bulgaria*, Stoicho Grüncharov considers the development of the dictatorship in the rather favorable conditions of political confrontation, also doing justice to the democratic political line of Petko Karavelov, which was defeated. He stresses the violence of the regime and the ideological simplification to “Bulgarians” and “traitors.” Having described the regime’s constructive economic and cultural measures, Grüncharov expresses the opinion (implicitly against Pantev) that the same could have been achieved without dictatorship by a bourgeois-democratic government and that what a dictatorship gains in not tolerating a political opposition and popular opinion comes at the expense of dissipation of its energies and more suffering of the masses. He states that a “slower, more fluent, and more uncoerced process of modernization” would have worked better. Grüncharov then describes the growing opposition in the regime’s last years and states that the dictatorship became counterproductive in an economic and political sense, while the Russophobe external course was superseded by the changed international situation. As for the national question, Grüncharov insists on his previous (and somewhat outdated) opinion that Russia expressed its discontent with developments in Bulgaria by reorienting toward Serbia after 1889 and that the hostile relations with Russia pushed Bulgaria into a path “with fatal historical consequences” because Bulgaria could not count on Russia to help resolve the national question.¹²⁴ What is questionable here (apart from particular theses and interpretations) is the very idea of having a quasi-official “academic” history of Bulgaria (the enterprise actually started before 1989). This endeavor presupposes extra-scholarly authority and unanimity, which under democratic conditions no longer exist and are hardly necessary.

The work of Elena Stelova is also balanced and distanced enough, though more pro-Stambolov (if we may say so). This is seen in her enumeration of the blunders of Russian diplomacy and of the various cases when Stambolov was seeking a compromise with Russia. Stelova reveals Stambolov’s achievements in the economic and the cultural field, but also the half-hearted and even dubious character of his economic incentives (concessions to individual persons, one-time subsidies, and so on). She points out that actual industrial protectionism started with Stambolov’s successor Konstantin Stoilov. She pays great attention to the fact that Stambolov’s tactics won the appointments of Bulgarian bishops in

¹²⁴ *Istoriya na Bŭlgariya* (History of Bulgaria), vol. 7 (Sofia: Izdatelstvo na BAN, 1991), 252–266, 272–279; citations on 265, 279.

Macedonia without looking for “tragic consequences” in the relations with Russia. Her final assessment is that Stambolov was “a great statesman, who ruled in troubled times with an iron hand, who was responsible for achievements in foreign policy and many harmful acts in domestic politics, which left lasting traces upon the subsequent development of Bulgarian democracy.” Still, Statelova does not blame Stambolov alone for compromising democratic principles but also holds partly responsible the crude political culture, which also manifested itself during Stoilov’s government, which restored liberal democracy.¹²⁵

These professional works (and Pantev’s more polemically pointed works) already fix something like a “rewriting” of this chapter of the modern Bulgarian history and of Bulgarian-Russian relations, which is reproduced with nuances by the authors of popular histories and textbooks.¹²⁶ The new academic consensus is moderately nationalist, pro-Stambolovist, and (in varying degrees) Russophobe. But there is room for dissenting voices. Outside the academy the opinions are less informed, but as a rule they are shriller and more nationalist.

In reviewing the latest historiography on Stambolov, especially the more synthetic and general works, one is struck by the impossibility of steering free of earlier interpretations, from paths already trodden in the accumulated historiographical tradition. Whatever one writes enters an implicit dialogue with the previous theses and interpretations, whether one takes up an older stance or tries to mediate between positions. The Bulgarian authors rarely acknowledge their debts to their predecessors (partly to appear more original themselves), but for the researcher of historiography the debts are obvious. There is no “pure” or neutral account, not only because each account is informed by one’s own assumptions and values, but also because the historian inevitably engages with previous scholarship. In this respect, no matter how distanced and balanced the analyses might be with respect to the historical realities or to extreme interpretations, they are never entirely fresh and “pure,” but are indebted to previous authors (reproducing their biases as well). At the same time, shifts occur in mean-

¹²⁵ Elena Statelova and Stoicho Grüncharov, *Istoriya na nova Bŭlgariya 1878–1944* (History of modern Bulgaria, 1878–1944) (Sofia: Anubis, 1999), 89–129 (Elena Statelova’s chapter); citations on 105, 127, 159.

¹²⁶ Milcho Lalkov, *Bŭlgariya sled Osvobozhenieto (1878–1912). Lektsionen kurs* (Bulgaria after the liberation, 1878–1912. A lecture course) (Sofia: Polis, 2001), 89–101; Ivan Lazarov, Ivan Tyutyundzhiev, Plamen Pavlov, and Milko Palangurski, *Lektsii po bŭlgarska istoriya. Chast II* (Lectures on the history of Bulgaria. Part II) (Veliko Tŭrnovo, 1991), 109–112 (the part by Milko Palangurski).

ings and interpretations. For that reason specialists on the topic (and careful general readers) can tell a pro-Stambolovist account from an anti-Stambolovist one, a Russophile reading from a Russophobe reading, and to what degree their leanings go; one can also compare and identify nuances. Historiography folds upon itself and pursues an internal dialogue. The historian of historiography is just one more voice in the never-ending historiographical discourse.

A new and important phenomenon after the fall of communism is the disintegration of the monopoly of professional historians from the “guild” over historical knowledge. Books that claim to be works of scholarship are now published freely by people outside the official institutions for the production of historical knowledge, such as departments of history at universities and institutes of history of the Academy of Sciences, and outside scientific and educational establishments in general. This is especially easy because many publishing houses do not solicit opinions of referees but are content with the author covering the expenses. The proliferating amateur authors are (with a few notable exceptions) writers of popular history at best, but many are promoters of strange ideas. In fact, sensation is the primary motive for publishing. But the borderline between professionals and amateurs is blurred from the other side as well, namely by professionals trying to impress the public with provocative ideas or by pseudo-scholars. Professionalism in the sense of certain standards (not as merely belonging to the “guild”) becomes difficult to maintain because of the lack of adequate critique and recognition. Here are a few examples of the new phenomenon, starting with the most outlandish.

In the spirit of “Bulgarianism” (i.e., a sort of nationalism of “roots”), Stambolov was presented by Dimitŭr Ivanov as an embodiment of *arete*, an ancient Greek word for qualities such as courage, strength, and heroism that can be generalized as virile virtues or excellence (and are ascribed by Ivanov to Ares, the Greek-Thracian god of war). Stambolov personified virile virtues and military qualities in his deeds as a statesman. He did good and bad, all in the name of the fatherland and with faith in its future. History postponed his recognition by more than a century but finally engraved his name “in the granite memory of the nation” as a continuer of the creative tradition, drawn by the “five rays of the star *arete*: faith, power, war, labor, and love.”¹²⁷

¹²⁷ Dimitŭr Ivanov, *Stefan Stambolov – ot peroto do yatagana* (Stefan Stambolov—from the quill to the sword) (Sofia: Izdatelstvo “Trud,” 2005), esp. 7–12, 174, 182; citation on 182.

The escape from Soviet/Russian dependence after communism brought about attempts at radical reassessment of the Russian “factor” in the history of Bulgaria. One example of this is Yanko Gochev’s amateurish three-volume work, whose title speaks for itself: *The Russian Empire against Bulgaria* (from 1472 to 1918).¹²⁸ It is hardly necessary to go into all the wrong or dubious assertions and inferences in this work. Suffice it to say that the hard-liner Russophobe and strongly nationalist narrative has one basic flaw: it ascribes everything bad in modern Bulgarian history to evil Russian interference, going so far as to suggest conspiracy theories, with all the preconceived ideas, adjustments, fabrications, and obsessions of this type of narrative. Somewhat paradoxically, behind all this is the wrong (one is tempted to say “sentimental Russophile”) assumption that the Bulgarian national interests (in their maximal version) should have been the guiding star of Russian imperial policies in the Balkans, hence Gochev’s strong disappointment that this was not the case (and his moral condemnation of Russia). At the same time Gochev is entirely uncritical of the leading Bulgarian politicians, who are mostly seen as passive objects of Russian manipulation (but not of other powers), as if they had no room for maneuver in defending Bulgarian national interests. Apart from that, he flatly considers many Bulgarian politicians and superior officers to be Russian tools and agents. As a whole this presents a mirror image of the Stalinist (hard-line Russophile) interpretation, which still accepts some “errors” of Russian tsarism, while here any benefits from it are denied.

There is also the reverse attempt to vindicate Russia’s policies towards Bulgaria, especially during Stambolov’s rule. By researching the secret negotiations between Stambolov and Russia (in 1888, 1890, and 1891) for the restoration of relations by the removal of Prince Ferdinand from the throne, Rama Bitsaeva-Stoyanova infers the good will of Russia and its unwillingness to interfere in Bulgaria’s internal affairs. According to her, Stambolov deceived the Bulgarian public with his anti-Russian propaganda, concealing Russia’s actual positions on the Bulgarian question. Thus in spite of Stambolov’s desire to get rid of Ferdinand, his Russophobia, along with his fear of losing the dominant role, impeded the conciliation. However, Bitsaeva-Stoyanova attributes less significance to Russia’s unwillingness to propose a new prince and to support the Bulgarian na-

¹²⁸ Yanko Gochev, *Ruskata imperiya sreshtu Bŭlgariya* (The Russian Empire against Bulgaria), vols. 1–3 (Sofia: Aniko, 2006), esp. vol. 1, 5–8, 123–151, 160–163; 320–323; vol. 2, 440–443; vol. 3, 311–314, 329–330, 363, 378, 383, 494–505, 526–532, 572–575, 589.

tional cause, i.e., the issues that mattered most for Stambolov.¹²⁹ This attempt is indicative of the flexibility in interpreting otherwise authentic documents (such as letters) and for the possibilities of manipulation by taking individual facts out of their general context. It matters little that it comes from a professional historian.

The writer and amateur historian Petūr Konstantinov seeks to vindicate Prince (after 1908 King) Ferdinand I, who is generally seen by Bulgarian historians as a megalomaniac and the main culprit of the national catastrophe because of his ambition to seize Istanbul during the Balkan War and, worse, ordering the attack on the allies on June 16, 1913 (which ignited the Inter-Allied War). He is described sympathetically as an imposing aristocratic personality—highly intelligent, self-confident, and ambitious, with plenty of vigor. Moreover, he is credited with the economic and cultural upsurge and the “unbelievably swift re-Europeanization of Bulgaria.” Under the “iron Stambolov” he felt that “the balancing role” of the monarchic institution was being taken away from him and that the sidelining of the throne was leading to dictatorship. After Stambolov’s removal, he did not establish a “personal regime” (contrary to the claims of contemporaries and historians) and never went beyond his constitutional prerogatives. But Ferdinand proved “too great” for the size and capacities of Bulgaria with his dream of Byzantium, while responsibility for the national catastrophe was not personal but collective.¹³⁰

A good example of quality history written outside the guild is Encho Mateev’s book *The Statesman Stefan Stambolov*. It is remarkable for its analytical clarity and its pointedly national and statist position (reminiscent of the new nationalism of the 1930s).¹³¹ Perhaps precisely because of that, Mateev is so insightful and able to do justice to Stambolov’s personality and politics, seen through kindred views and convictions. Above all,

¹²⁹ Rama Bitsaeva-Stoyanova, *Tainite pregovori (1888, 1890, 1891 godina) na Stefan Stambolov s Rusiya* (The secret negotiations [1888, 1890, 1891] of Stefan Stambolov with Russia) (Sofia: Izdatelska kushta “Künchev i sie,” 2001), esp. 69, 74–75, 78–80.

¹³⁰ Petūr Konstantinov, *Istoriya na Bŭlgariya. S nyakoi premŭlchavani dosega istoricheski fakti 681–1996* (History of Bulgaria. With some previously unmentioned historical facts, 681–1996) (Sofia: Karina M, 1997), esp. 116–117, 122, 148–151, 168–169. A similar attempt to glorify Ferdinand over Stambolov: Zhoro Tsvetkov, *Sblŭsŭkŭt. Ferdinand, Stambolov, Rusiya, 1886–1896* (The clash. Ferdinand, Stambolov, Russia, 1886–1896) (Sofia: Izdatelstvo na Sofiiskiya universitet “Sv. Kliment Okhridski,” 2003).

¹³¹ Encho Mateev, *Dŭrzhavnikŭt Stefan Stambolov* (The statesman Stefan Stambolov) (Sofia: Letopisi, 1992). Mateev was a member of a right-wing youth organization as a youth and suffered political repression after the communist takeover.

Stambolov is depicted as a politician and a statesman who acted to promote the Bulgarian national idea and statehood. He possessed an extraordinarily developed statist consciousness, which Mateev calls “state nationalism.” His basic ideas and convictions were the self-determination of the nation, the sovereignty of the state and its uncompromising independence, an autonomous and independent path of development, self-confidence and self-reliance, and even an irrational faith in Bulgaria. Without denying Russia’s role as liberator and while seeking an agreement with Russia, Stambolov staunchly defended the independence and sovereignty of the Bulgarian state. He was not a Russophobe but a “Bulgarophile,” in the sense of standing for the interests of the Bulgarian state. He saw Prince Ferdinand as a personification of an important institution and symbol of the state and national sovereignty, hence his compromises with the person and his support for the monarch.¹³² Mateev explains Stambolov’s dictatorship as provoked by the no less anti-constitutional activities of his adversaries (and—a new motive—to restrain the monarch). According to Mateev, faced with the dramatic choice of democracy versus state sovereignty, Stambolov correctly chose the latter because civil rights and freedoms can be exercised only in one’s own state. Admittedly, some of his actions were needless and superfluous, others were a result of his corrupted followers, and still others resulted from his exhaustion from the continuing strife.¹³³

Regarding national liberation and unification in particular, Stambolov had entirely realistic and justified views. He believed that the Macedonian question was complex and complicated and could not be solved by spontaneous movements and irresponsible organizations (for that reason, he was against the Macedonian revolutionary organization); that the Bulgarian state alone had the power, authority, and responsibility to represent and implement the national interests; and that Macedonia should not be partitioned. He believed that the process of developing Bulgarian national consciousness and of consolidating the Bulgarian nation in Macedonia needed to be promoted by peaceful means (e.g., through schools and the Bulgarian Church) and while keeping good relations with the Ottoman Empire. Keeping such relations would not pose a danger of denationalization, particularly as the Empire was considered to be doomed to decay and disintegration (hence the tactical idea of “dualism” with Turkey). In this way, Stambolov believed, little by little the soil for Macedonia’s political

¹³² Ibid., 10–13, 24, 41–46.

¹³³ Ibid., 47–48, 60–64, 70, 76–79.

self-determination would be prepared until the conditions were ripe for action.¹³⁴ It was precisely the deviation from these principles and this strategy that had catastrophic consequences for the Bulgarian national cause, namely the acceptance of the principle of division of Macedonia as a condition for concluding an agreement with the neighbors (the Balkan Alliance). This acceptance was a priori bad for Bulgarian national goals as it left future boundaries unclear, engaged the Bulgarian army in Eastern Thrace, and left Western Thrace and Macedonia to the allied armies of Greece and Serbia. In addition to this, there came the personal ambitions of King Ferdinand, mesmerized by Constantinople (resulting in the alienation of Russia) and the stronger Russian interest in supporting Serbia against Austria-Hungary (hence the support of Serbia's aspirations in Macedonia). According to Mateev's counterfactual hypothesis, the status quo and time worked in Bulgaria's favor, and if the resolution of the national question was not sought through Balkan agreements (with all that flowed from that), but in the general European context, Bulgaria's position, especially in World War I, would have been stronger. But Bulgarian politicians after Stambolov did not follow the same correct course, due to the Bulgarian public's political and intellectual lack of sophistication and the absence of an established and recognized governing class with a rational national program. It was also due to the spontaneous and primitive patriotism that pushed for immediate action to liberate compatriots beyond the borders.¹³⁵ As can be seen (and independent of one's own views), this is a consistent nationalist and statist account that credits Stambolov with great statesmanship and farsightedness in dealing with the national question. It is hardly original, but it takes the bits and pieces and welds them into a consistent and forceful analysis that asserts precisely what the communist historiography denied Stambolov.

By way of conclusion, I will try to answer the question of what drives the controversies and reassessments of Stambolov and the Russophile-Russophobe theme in Bulgarian historiography. To begin with, Stambolov symbolizes the will to Bulgaria's independence and sovereignty—a will that was asserted in front of great powers and in defiance of the liberator

¹³⁴ Ibid., 87–109, 120–123, 135–138, 217–218.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 200–216, 218–219; hypothesis on 208–211. The same hypothesis was elaborated before that by a Bulgarian political émigré: Stefan Popov, *Trinadeset bŭlgarski veka* (Thirteen Bulgarian centuries), in Stefan Popov, *Bŭlgarskata ideya. Istoricheski ocherti* (The Bulgarian idea. Historical essays) (Munich, 1981), 91–130, esp. 119–120, 122–123.

Russia, moreover, in a dramatic situation and with success. Such moments of attaining autonomy and (relative) state sovereignty were rare in modern Bulgarian history: the first time was with Stambolov and until the wars, then again in the 1930s and once more after 1989. An absence of (real) sovereignty and varying degrees of dependence were the norm: after the liberation under Russian tutelage until 1885, as a defeated state under allied control after World War I, as a “satellite” of Germany during World War II, and most strongly, under Soviet domination during the communist regime. This explains the fascination with a figure such as Stambolov from a national and still more from a strongly nationalist point of view. Quite understandably, it was during the communist regime, with the debasement of the Bulgarian state sovereignty and full subordination to the Soviet Union (Russia’s successor), that Stambolov became still more attractive. The analogies became inevitable, hence the vigilant surveillance of the problematic, the mandatory interpretation and the taboos set by the authorities. At the same time the communist regime’s evolution toward nationalism drove (or permitted) the “creeping” vindication of Stambolov. The attempts to combine Bulgarian nationalism with the official Russophile political line led to artificial constructs in the historiography on Stambolov (e.g., “Russophilia”=patriotism).

In addition, Stambolov was indisputably a strong personality; he engages the traditional interest of historians and the even stronger interest of the lay public toward the great personalities in history. It is also important that as a dictator at the head of the state, he is not regarded as belonging to any party, but stands “above parties” (in fact, he hardly allowed them to exist). He is thus elevated to a prototypical statesman, defending the nation and state sovereignty and pursuing national policies toward the irredenta. Hardly any other politicians in modern Bulgarian history hold this status (Stamboliiski, for instance, was a leader of the Agrarian Union, and his statesmanship is disputed). The interest toward such a personality was even stronger in the times of political nonentities and the grayness of state socialism.

At the root of the “philes and phobes” problem, i.e., of the orientation towards one foreign power or another, was the fact that a small and weak state was looking for a great power (or powers) as protector or benefactor and eventually sought to achieve its national goals with that power’s help and through maneuvers in international relations. We came across various formulations of this problem: the initial expectation of the liberation (from the Ottomans) from Russia or the West; Stambolov’s standing up for Bulgarian independence against Russia with the support of Great Britain and

Austria-Hungary; the subsequent search for an ally in solving the “national question” (Macedonia); and the more complex orientation in general wars (the Triple Alliance versus the Entente, the German-led Axis versus the Allies) or in peace (the European Union versus Russia). The foreign political orientations translate domestically into “phile” and “phobe” preferences of the politicians (and the citizens) of the country. Hence the dilemma (if there is an alternative): with whom would it be better? That depended on what was at stake: achieving national liberation or unification, preserving independence and autonomy, or gaining economic prosperity.

In its modern history Bulgaria has fallen within the geopolitical zone of (military-strategic, if not territorial) interests and under the decisive influence of several great powers in differing degrees of dependence or, respectively, restriction of state sovereignty (which for a small state is restricted anyway) and limitation of autonomy in its domestic affairs. Foremost among them were the liberator Russia, which exercised a kind of protectorate for a few years after 1878 and helped with the initial building of the state and then again became all-dominant as the Soviet Union after World War II, and Germany, especially as an ally in World War I and World War II. Great Britain and France’s interests were weaker and sporadic and consisted mainly of counteracting Russian or German influence, while Italy was insufficiently strong to make its influence felt. Hence Russophilia/phobia and Germanophilia/phobia defined the main foreign political orientations of Bulgarian politicians and political parties. The clash of Russian and “Germanic” interests (i.e., including Austria-Hungary) in the Balkans and in Bulgaria in particular, sometimes generalized as a fight between “Slavdom” and “Germanism,” manifested itself in the wars against the Ottoman Empire, in the aftermath of the Bulgarian liberation, in World Wars I and II (then overlaid by the fight between communism versus fascism). Anglophilia and Francophilia were politically (if not culturally) much weaker in Bulgaria and existed mainly as political trends in opposition to the alliance with Germany in World Wars I and II.

In the historiography the external political preferences and orientations (“philes” and “phobes”) function as frameworks of the interpretation, which are above-empirical and in the end value-laden with commitments on the part of the historians themselves. Not only can the supporting empirical data be selected, but the same facts look different depending on the historian’s “philia” or “phobia” for a certain great power (e.g., in judging the danger from Russia during Stambolov’s rule). The value judgment is

reflected in the terms chosen for a “description,” which is clearly seen in the conceptually opposite interpretations of the role of Russia/the Soviet Union in Bulgarian history—“liberation” and “brotherhood” versus “occupation” and “subjugation.” The same goes for the role of Germany during the two world wars—“alliance” or “imperialist plunder.” One might expect more unambiguous measuring standards for a national history from the national point of view. But the latter is itself not unambiguous, as there are different understandings of the national interest and also of the ways to act upon it. As we saw, this was exactly the point of departure of the “philes” and the “phobes.” And when they went too far in subjugating the country to a foreign power, they defended themselves precisely by citing the national interest.

The shifts of the powerful external influences in particular, which changed quite often and dramatically, left a deep impact upon Bulgarian historiography. There were several such turning points: the liberation in 1878, which naturally increased Russophilia (quite strong since the 1840s), the break with the liberator Russia in 1886, the dependence on the victors and the soul-searching after the unsuccessful wars (the Second Balkan War and World War I), the alliance with Nazi Germany in World War II, the absorption into the Soviet bloc after World War II, the fall of communism in 1989 (and accession to the European Union in 2007). The more recent turning points in modern Bulgarian history in particular have led to a historiographical reappraisal of the “failed” external orientation and retrospective assertion of the new one. Most lasting was the communist-Russophile “rewriting” of Bulgarian history, which was imposed by force after the communist takeover on September 9, 1944. It is by far the most represented in the historiography, because the historical profession expanded in the socialist era and a great amount of scholarship was produced.

Contrary to what some historians came to believe during late socialism, there is no “final justification” of a given line of development or definitive “judgment of history,” but only assessments as of a certain date. This is because the course of history itself continues, and new, though unforeseeable, turning points inevitably emerge. The fall of the Russophile paradigm after 1989 is quite instructive in this respect. The radical reassessment of the role of Russia in Bulgarian history reached as far back as the liberation and even before that to the era of national Revival. Without the Russophile lenses, it seems sufficiently clear now that, because of the rivalry among the great powers in the Balkans and the counteracting of Russia’s influence by the other powers, Bulgarian liberation could only be

“partial” and “mutilated,” and this determined the directions of future Bulgarian irredentism and laid down the prerequisites for subsequent great-power interference.¹³⁶ That Russia has played a “fateful” role for the Bulgarians is beyond doubt, and some historians have gone so far as to question whether liberation by Russia was worth it, given the limitations and consequences.

The end of communism and of Soviet dependency and the accession of Bulgaria to the European Union has already led to reassessments of the role of Western Europe in modern Bulgarian history. Half in jest (but based on the rich experience of retrospective “new readings” in accordance with the geopolitical changes and the influence of the present on historical knowledge in general), one may ask whether Stambolov will be “updated” to reflect the new realities. Perhaps, for example, he will be celebrated as a farsighted politician because, as early as the end of the nineteenth century, he oriented Bulgaria toward the “progressive” liberal-democratic Western states. To begin with, with their help he asserted national independence from Russia. His policy was historically “justified” one century later. Conversely, the deviations from his pro-Western course (the conclusion of the Balkan Alliance under Russian auspices and the Russian arbitration) led to the national catastrophe in the Balkan Wars and in World War I (where Bulgaria’s choice was largely conditioned by the outcome of the Balkan Wars). Still more unfortunate was the loss of Bulgarian independence under Soviet rule, in which the national question remained unsolved (and for a time there was even a possibility of losing the Bulgarian part of Macedonia). Only with the “return to Europe” have new opportunities appeared, including for resolving the national question in another form and framework within a united Europe. While this caricatures the type of reasoning employed to justify the Russophile line, enough proof has been given of bad retrospective reasoning in the national historiography for this possibility to be taken seriously as well.

¹³⁶ Nikolai Genchev, *Spomeni* (Memoirs), 266; Iliya Todev, “Sanstefanskiyat mit” (The myth of San Stefano), in Iliya Todev, *Novi ochertsy po bŭlgarska istoriya. Vŭzrazhdane* (New essays in Bulgarian history. The Revival) (Sofia: Vek 22, 1995), 218–224. Still more radical in Stefan Popov, “Trinadest bŭlgarski veka,” 114–116.

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CHAPTER 2

The Rule of the Bulgarian Agrarian National Union and the “Worker-Peasant Alliance”

More has been written on the Bulgarian Agrarian National Union (*Bulgarski zemedelski naroden suyuz*, henceforth the Agrarian Union or simply Agrarians) than on any other party except for the Communist Party. This interest is no coincidence, even if the motives remain hidden. The Agrarian Union was a mass party with the broadest social base in Bulgaria, and it sought, successfully, to represent the peasants. It was a “world view” (ideological) party with its own distinctive and very radical ideas about politics, the economy, and society in general, different both from classical liberal democracy and communist ideology. It ruled Bulgaria on its own during the extraordinary crisis times of defeat after World War I and then made a far-reaching attempt to implement its radical ideas. After a military coup d’état brutally overthrew the Agrarian Union on June 9, 1923, its left wing was a preferred ally of the Bolshevized communists in their new strategy of broadening the “front” against capitalism and fascism, while its centrist and right wings were sought by the bourgeois parties in their effort to increase the government’s representative (and popular) character. Finally, after the communists assumed power on September 9, 1944, they brutally suppressed the opposition of the Agrarian Union but preserved an emasculated branch of it as attesting to the “worker-peasant alliance” and a “peculiarity” of the Bulgarian socialist regime until its very end.

The literature on the Bulgarian Agrarian National Union comes from several quarters.¹ Some literature comes from Agrarian party milieus; this

¹ See Dinyu Sharlanov, “Deloto na Aleksandŭr Stamboliiski v istoricheskata literatura” (The deeds of Aleksandŭr Stamboliiski in historiography), *Istoricheski pregled* 43, no. 2 (1987), 3–18. But my historiographical review is quite different.

has understandable sympathies toward its ideology and practical measures—some quite laudatory, others more critical. Other writings come from representatives of the contemporary bourgeois elites (politicians and public figures, intellectuals, lawyers, scholars) and (with some exceptions) are very critical toward the regime and its ideas. Finally there is literature from the standpoint of the Communist Party, to which the Agrarians were for a long time the stronger rival in left-wing politics, with characteristic changes of attitude depending on the party line and the fortunes of the two parties. This is also the point of departure of the vast majority of the scholarly historiography, notwithstanding a few short treatments of the Agrarian government in the pre-communist historiography. It is due primarily to the fact that the interwar period came to historians' attention mostly after World War II, in keeping with the then-accepted view that one should avoid writing a history of the present. Thus research and writing about the Agrarians coincided with the rewriting of Bulgarian history from a communist standpoint, for instance as a history of class struggles. But it should be noted that both the socialist regime and historiography evolved; there appeared more distanced, theoretical, and reflexive—and in this sense scholarly—treatments of Agrarian ideas and politics.

The historiography on the Agrarian Union is concentrated in several thematic areas and periods: the beginning of the agrarian movement and the formation of its ideology (agrarianism or peasantism); its ascent to power, its reforms and further elaboration of its ideas, its foreign policy and the relations with other political forces; the crisis and the splits of the Agrarian Union after the violent overthrow, the evolution of its ideas and the relations with various political forces and especially with the communists; and its fortunes under the "people's democracy" and afterwards. In this essay I will deal with the historiography on major debated issues, mostly concerning the ideas and the rule of the Agrarian Union (1919–1923), but also its subsequent evolution. Some basic facts will be presented as a foundation for the interpretations. In all cases I will pay special attention to the standpoints from which the Agrarian movement is treated, which condition the way it is seen and evaluated.

The Road to Power

The Agrarian Union ascended to power in a situation of acute crisis, dislocation, suffering, and "revolutionary" discontent following Bulgaria's defeat in World War I. The traditional bourgeois parties that led the war

were deeply discredited among the masses, including the sympathizers with the Entente, who took over towards the end of the war. In contrast, the Agrarian Union not only did not take part in the wartime governments, but strongly opposed the war.² Its leader, Aleksandŭr Stamboliiski, courageously warned King Ferdinand I (of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha) against entering the war in a verbal clash so sharp that Stamboliiski was sentenced and sent to prison (where he spent the war years).

The discontent of the Bulgarian troops on the southern (Thessaloniki) front, who were in a critical situation against a much stronger enemy, found expression in a spontaneous revolt of the soldiers with the vague idea of punishing the culprits of the war. The agrarian leaders Raiko Daskalov and Aleksandŭr Stamboliiski were released from prison and sent by the authorities in a delegation to dissuade the soldiers. Instead, Raiko Daskalov assumed command of the troops and declared a republic in Radomir on September 27, 1918, while Aleksandŭr Stamboliiski (who was elsewhere) agreed. The insurgent troops on their way to Sofia were routed on the city's outskirts, at Vladaya (the rebellion is hence called the Radomir or Vladaya Rebellion).³ The failure of the rebellion was due not only to bad command and the quick organization of defense, but also to the urgently concluded armistice with the Entente, which would hardly allow for a revolutionary outcome. In any case, the rebellion attests to the resoluteness of the Agrarian leaders, who did not shrink from using revolutionary means.

The Agrarian Union ascended to power through elections (August 1919), in which it won a plurality and (after the "narrow" and the "broad" socialists turned down its offer to take part) formed a coalition government with right-wing parties in October 1919. The postwar "revolutionary" crisis continued with a struggle between the left forces for supremacy, which culminated in the (railway) transport strike, organized by the "narrow" (i.e., more orthodox) socialists and the "broad" (reformist) socialists in December 1919–January 1920. It grew into a general political

² The representatives of the Agrarian Union finally voted the credits for the war in the National Assembly, and some used the situation to speculate in grain. See John Bell, *Peasants in Power: Alexander Stamboliski and the Bulgarian Agrarian National Union, 1899–1923* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1977), 116–121.

³ After the failure of the uprising, Raiko Daskalov emigrated, while Stamboliiski remained in hiding in Sofia until an amnesty was granted. The other Agrarian leaders and Dimitŭr Dragiev in particular did not approve of the uprising, but the delegates of the Fifteenth Agrarian Congress (at which Stamboliiski prevailed over Dragiev) embraced the uprising as their own deed.

strike but was resolutely put down by the Agrarian government. After winning new elections in March 1920 (again without a majority) and the cancellation of several deputies from other parties, the Agrarian Union formed a government on its own in May 1920. It should be noted that the Agrarian leaders twice offered cooperation to the “narrow” socialists (of Dimitŭr Blagoev)—in leading the Radomir Rebellion and in forming a cabinet—but were turned down.

In hard-line communist historiography, the postwar crisis in Bulgaria is treated as part of the “general crisis of capitalism” that began after the Great War and was exacerbated by the October Revolution in Russia. From this (extremely dogmatic) standpoint, things look as follows: under the influence of the Great October Socialist Revolution, a revolutionary crisis and a revolutionary situation developed in Bulgaria in 1918–1919. It did not evolve into a (socialist) revolution because of the absence of communist leadership (the socialists were not yet Bolshevized) and the absence of an alliance between the workers and the peasants, largely due to the shortcomings and mistakes of the narrow socialists (who refused to participate in the Radomir Rebellion).⁴ Since the two polar forces (bourgeoisie and proletariat) were for the moment in balance, it became possible for the petty bourgeois Agrarian Union, with its utopian ideas of “peasant democracy” within the bourgeois social establishment, to come to power. Moreover, the Bulgarian bourgeoisie itself ceded power (temporarily) to the Agrarians because it considered them a “party of order” and the lesser evil that would save it from communism.⁵ This is attested to by

⁴ As a rule the authors refer to Georgi Dimitrov, “Politicheski otchet na Tsentralniya komitet na Bŭlgarskata Rabotnicheska Partiya (komunisti) pred Petiya Kongres na Partiyata, 19 dekemvri 1948” (Political report of the Central Committee of the Bulgarian Workers’ Party [Communists] before the Fifth Congress of the Party, December 19, 1948). In Georgi Dimitrov, *Sŭchineniya* (Works), vol. 15 (Sofia, 1955), 221–349, esp. 233. According to Dimitrov, the united action between the communists and the Agrarian Union under the slogan for peace and a people’s democratic republic would have assured the success of the uprising, “which could have altered the general course of developments,” but the Socialist Party then did not live up to its task.

⁵ M.A. Birman, *Revolutsionnaya situatsiya v Bolgarii v 1918–1919 gg.* (The revolutionary situation in Bulgaria in 1918–1919) (Moscow: Izdatel’stvo Akademii nauk SSSR, 1957), esp. 372–379. Hristo Hristov is better disposed toward the Agrarian Union and defines the formation of an Agrarian government as a “victory of the democratic forces of the people over the forces of the reaction and of the counter-revolution.” See Hristo Hristov, *Revolutsionnata kriza v Bŭlgariya prez 1918–1919* (The revolutionary crisis in Bulgaria in 1918–1919) (Sofia: Izdatelstvo na BKP, 1957), 577.

statements of bourgeois leaders.⁶ Later on the Agrarian Union played a reactionary role, not only in suppressing the transport strike, but also in distracting the peasants with the errant theory of “rule of the peasants” and a “third way” (neither socialism nor capitalism).

The dogmatic authors in general overestimate the influence of the October Revolution upon the situation in Bulgaria in revolutionizing the soldiers in particular and exaggerate the possibilities for a revolution in Bulgaria, implicitly expected to be socialist.⁷ The Radomir soldier rebellion seems to them, if not a revolution stolen (by the Agrarian Union), then at least a revolution refused (by the socialists themselves), but in any case, a revolution with real potential. This is because in militant Leninists’ understanding, every revolt (given the right leadership) may grow into a revolution, and any revolution may evolve at some stage into a socialist one. From this point of view a spontaneous mutiny of soldiers with limited and unclear objectives may be called a “revolution” or at least potentially contains it. The voluntarist thinking in the direction of one’s own wishes is in full swing.

A more flexible and realistic analysis of the postwar situation (meaning not just 1918–1919, but 1918–1924), though again in Leninist terms, is pre-

⁶ See the parliamentary speech of the (Radical Democrat) Yosif Fadenkhekht from May 2, 1920, in *Dnevniitsi na XIX ONS, Pŭrva izvŭnredna sesiya, Kniga 1* (Protocols of the Nineteenth Ordinary National Assembly, First Extraordinary Session, Book 1), 376. See also the newspaper *Mir*, no. 5976, April 17, 1920. In the same sense the opinions of contemporaries: Aleksandŭr Panov, *Aleksandŭr Stamboliiski v politicheskiya zhivot na Bŭlgariya* (Aleksandŭr Stamboliiski in the political life of Bulgaria) (Sofia, 1921), 38; Ivan Zlatev, *Obedinenie i obnovenie na partiite* (Union and regeneration of the parties) (Sofia, 1922), 37–38.

⁷ Kŭnyu Kozhukharov, Nikolai Georgiev, and Dimitŭr Dimitrov, *Bŭlgarskiyat zemedelski naroden sŭyuz i Velikata oktomvriiska sotsialisticheska revolyutsiya* (The Bulgarian Agrarian National Union and the Great October Socialist Revolution) (Sofia: Izdatelstvo na BZNS, 1957), esp. 22–27; Hristo Hristov, “Velikata oktomvriiska sotsialisticheska revolyutsiya i razvitiето na revolyutsionното dvizhenie v Bŭlgariya” (The Great October Socialist Revolution and the development of the revolutionary movement in Bulgaria). In Hristo Hristov, ed., *Oktomvriiskata revolyutsiya i bŭlgaro-sŭvetskata družba* (The October Revolution and Bulgarian-Soviet friendship) (Sofia: Izdatelstvo na BAN, 1967), 9–40; Lyubomir Ognyanov, *Voinishkoto vŭstanie 1918* (The Soldiers’ Uprising of 1918) (Sofia: Nauka i izkustvo, 1988), 171, 173. More realistically, the Agrarian author Kŭnyu Kozhukharov (before changing his view) saw in the Radomir Rebellion not socialist slogans and objectives, but a soldiers’ revolt for punishing the culprits for the war and for abolition of the monarchy and proclamation of a republic: Kŭnyu Kozhukharov, *Radomirskata republika 1918–1948* (The Radomir republic, 1918–1948) (Sofia: Fondatsiya “Al. Stamboliiski,” 1948), esp. 14–40.

sented by Stefan Radulov. He denies the availability of “objective” prerequisites not only for a socialist revolution (implied by most authors, for whom only the “subjective factor” was not sufficient), but for any other revolution. The general situation is better designated as a political crisis. Radulov points to the main social forces—workers, petty bourgeoisie, bourgeoisie—and considers the alternatives for resolving the “revolutionary situation.” The working class, though strongly politicized, was small, divided between “narrow” and “broad” socialists, and not “ripe” for the socialist idea. Thus the basic contradiction of the era—between labor and capital (workers and bourgeoisie)—did not become a decisive factor except for a short time during the transport strike at the end of 1919.⁸ The major feature of the postwar crisis was the growing political role and significance of the petty (mostly peasant) bourgeoisie and its efforts to find its own solution to the political crisis. The social contradiction, which then became decisive, was between the petty and the big bourgeoisie, exacerbated by the economic consequences of the war (the October Revolution is not mentioned here). This contradiction’s eventual resolution in favor of the petty bourgeoisie (as actually happened) meant the establishment of a dictatorship of the petty bourgeoisie (instead of a dictatorship of the big bourgeoisie) and a thorough reform of the capitalist society in the petty bourgeoisie’s interest, more precisely, according to the principle of labor property. Moreover, as this contradiction took center stage, it hampered the development of the contradiction between labor and capital, yet a merging of the various revolutionary currents would have been necessary for a revolution to succeed. Alongside these (constantly active) class contradictions, in the last year of the war there arose another (temporary) contradiction with a broader nationwide character, sharpened by the October Revolution. This contradiction was between the bourgeoisie’s efforts to continue the war and the popular masses’ efforts to end it and conclude a peace. With this contradiction, the other two contradictions became temporarily interlaced and found expression not in a socialist revolution, but in a “spontaneous” struggle for peace and a democratic republic culminating in the Radomir soldier rebellion.⁹

⁸ Radulov works with the then-current casuistic differentiation between a “basic” contradiction (between workers and bourgeoisie) and “main” contradiction that happened to come to the foreground in the particular case, for example, between peasants and bourgeoisie, people and rulers, and anti-fascists and fascists. The underlying reason is to rescue the Marxist idea that the class conflict between labor and capital comes first, even though the historical realities show other conflicts.

⁹ Stefan Radulov, “Za haraktera na sledvoennata kriza v Bŭlgariya (1918–1923 g.)” (On the character of the postwar crisis in Bulgaria, 1918–1923). *Nauchni trudove na*

Finally, the postwar crisis influenced the behavior of the (big) bourgeoisie, from whose ranks two currents were formed: one for preserving the bourgeois democracy as a form of its political domination with a seemingly broad popular participation, and another one for establishing an “open bourgeois dictatorship” with the use of terror. The bourgeoisie tried the first by building up a “united bourgeois front” (the so-called Constitutional Bloc during Agrarian rule) and, after its failure, made use of the second option, especially as the Agrarian Union had restricted its social base and influence among the masses.¹⁰ If we ignore the doctrinaire dictionary with its predefined types of contradictions, this is a more adequate description of the postwar situation: it was not revolutionary, and still less directed toward socialism. It started with striving toward peace and a republic (the Radomir Rebellion), then came the workers’ activity (the transport strike), then the “petty bourgeois solution” prevailed in the form of peasant rule, followed by an “open bourgeois dictatorship” (the coup d’état of June 9, 1923) and the genesis of fascism.

Agrarian Rule: Ideology and Reforms

Upon taking power, the Agrarian Union already possessed an elaborated ideology and a reform program, which continued to evolve during its rule.¹¹ Central to the ideology is the so-called “estatist theory” and “rule of

Akademiyata za obshtestveni nauki i sotsialno upravlenie na Tsentralniya Komitet na BKP. Istoriya, vol. 89, 1977, 254–299. On the petty bourgeois resolution of the postwar crisis as a third (middle) way and a serious breach in the class domination of the bourgeoisie: Stefan Radulov, *Upravlenieto na BZNS i bŭlgarskata burzhoaziya* (The rule of the Bulgarian Agrarian National Union and the Bulgarian bourgeoisie) (Sofia: Izdatelstvo na BZNS, 1981), 6, 401–408.

¹⁰ About the impact of the crisis on the bourgeoisie and the way out the bourgeoisie sought, see Stefan Radulov, “Krizata v obshtestveno-politicheskite vŭzgledi na burzhoaznata demokratiya v Bŭlgariya (1919–1923 g.)” (The crisis in the social-political views of the bourgeois democracy in Bulgaria, 1919–1923). *Nauchni trudove na Akademiyata za obshtestveni nauki i sotsialno upravlenie pri Tsentralniya komitet na BKP. Seriya Istoriya*, no. 52, 1972.

¹¹ This ideology has its beginnings with Dimitŭr Dragiev, *Gde e spasenieto na bŭlgarskite zemedeltsi?* (Where lies the salvation of the Bulgarian tillers?) (Plovdiv, 1907). It was elaborated by Aleksandŭr Stamboliiski, *Politicheski partii ili sŭslovni organizatsii?* (Political parties or estatist organizations?) (Sofia, 1920; reprint, 1990); Aleksandŭr Stamboliiski, *Printsipite na Bŭlgarskiya zemedelski naroden sŭyuz* (The principles of the Bulgarian Agrarian National Union), in Aleksandŭr Stamboliiski, *Izbrani proizvedeniya* (Selected works) (Sofia: Izdatelstvo na BZNS, 1979), 218–238 (first published 1919). See also G.F. Matveev, “O nekotorykh istochnikov ideologicheskoi kontseptsii A. Stam-

the people" (*narodovlastie*) and, on the economic plane, the idea of "labor property" as an economic basis of a "labor democracy." With great simplification (but enough to see the point of the polemics) and without taking account of the evolution of the views, one can point out the following features. According to "estatist" theory, the contemporary society is composed of "estates" in the sense of broad social groups (layers) with similar livelihood and profession, such as workers, peasants, artisans, traders, civil servants, and the like, which have different and often contradictory interests. The peasants are a productive estate (producers of vital goods) and contribute the most to society, but they are placed in especially bad conditions of exploitation by money-lenders, bureaucrats, traders, lawyers, and doctors, and by the town in general. The estates are (or should be) represented by estatist organizations, which fight for their economic and other interests. The Agrarian Union is the estatist organization of the peasants, the Socialist Party represents the workers, the professional unions represent the interests of the civil servants and other professions, and so on.¹² The political parties proper have played a historically progressive role in fighting the absolutist rulers and achieving representative government and civil rights. But in contemporary society they are discredited by partisan struggles and corruption and doomed to disappearance and replacement by estatist organizations.

Agrarian ideology insists on conducting legal political struggles and striving to acquire the state power through elections. It advocates the widest possible "rule of the people." As the peasants in Bulgaria at that time were almost eighty percent of the population, this (implicitly) means a peasant democracy. The state is seen as an instrument for conducting thoroughgoing socioeconomic reforms in the interest of the peasants, particularly smallholders and middle peasants. The ideal social-economic order from the point of view of agrarian ideology rests upon small-scale private property, called "labor" property, with the idea that it is worked with one's own (family) labor, without the exploitation of hired labor. The achievement of this ideal requires a thorough reform of capitalism, especially the abolishment of large-scale property and big business, while pre-

boliiskogo" (Some sources of the ideological theory of A. Stamboliiski), *Izvestiya na Bŭlgarskoto istorichesko druzhestvo*, vol. 39 (Sofia, 1987), 229–254.

¹² As pointed out by the prominent jurist Petko Stainov at the time, in spite of its estatist ideology, the Agrarian Union did not, while in office, change the parliamentary system to a representation of economic "estates" ("economic parliament"). See Petko Stainov, *Kompetentnost i narodovlastie* (Competence and rule of the people) (Sofia, 1923; reprint, Sofia: Nauka i izkustvo, 1994), 73–76, 90–92.

serving private property as such (up to a certain size). This can be done in various ways, but mostly through a strong and far-reaching interference of the state (etatism): state regulation, state monopolies, and considerable state property, though not full nationalization. Small-scale property asserts itself also from “below”—through numerous cooperatives that spread over various domains of the economy (driving out the big capitalist firms). If taken to extremes, this results in a new type of public property and becomes the basis of a peculiar cooperative order. The economic (labor) democracy corresponds with the political “rule of the people” and serves as its stable basis—a “labor democracy” attuned to the ideals of social justice and humanism in general. The “rule of the people” implements a wide-ranging social program, including cheap and accessible justice, democratization of education, decentralized health care, and a solution to the housing problem. This type of socio-economic and political order is neither capitalist nor socialist (because it preserves private property), but a peculiar “third (or middle) way.”

During its rule the Agrarian Union implemented a thorough reform in the spirit of the declared principles—more than a hundred laws, not counting the administrative measures.¹³ Among its basic and lasting reforms (partly changed afterwards, but preserved) were compulsory labor service, land reform, reform of education, a law for the water syndicates, and the encouragement of cooperatives. The compulsory labor service, which the Agrarians were especially proud of, introduced obligatory public service (twelve months for men and six months for women), initially without any exemptions. Whether or not it achieved the labor-educational purposes, it secured cheap labor mostly for construction works (railroads, roads, and public buildings). And though it was vehemently denounced by the opposition as “corvée” (serfdom), it was subsequently preserved (there was an option of paying one’s way out of the obligation).

¹³ The laws passed by the Agrarian Union are collected in Aleksandŭr Stamboliiski, *Zakonodatelna deinost na pravitelstvoto na Bŭlgarskiya zemedelski naroden sŭyuz 1919–1923* (Legislative activity of the government of the Bulgarian Agrarian National Union, 1919–1923) (Sofia, 2003). On the reforms of the Agrarian Union, see Aleksandŭr Velev, *Glavni reformi na zemedelskoto pravitelstvo* (Main reforms of the Agrarian government) (Sofia, 1977); Dimitrina Petrova, *Samostoyatelnoto upravlenie na BZNS 1920–1923* (The one-party rule of BANU, 1920–1923) (Sofia: Nauka i izkustvo, 1988), 100–139; Stefan Radulov, *Upravlenieto na BZNS*; Elena Statelova and Stoicho Grŭncharov, *Istoriya na nova Bŭlgariya 1878–1944* (History of modern Bulgaria, 1878–1944) (Sofia: Anubis, 1999), 356–399 (chapter by Stoicho Grŭncharov); John Bell, *Peasants in Power*, 154–207.

The land reform was based on the principle of “labor property,” meaning that land should not exceed the labor capacity of a family, and possessions above a certain size had to be expropriated with compensation and go to a fund for providing land to landless peasants and refugees.¹⁴ The reform provoked strong protests because it violated the principle of private property (which was inviolable, according to the constitution). However, in a country of smallholders, it affected few private estates, and the fund was established mostly from state and community lands; moreover, its implementation did not advance much during Agrarian rule because of deficient administration. Under a new form and without encroaching upon private land (the expropriated lands were returned), it was continued and implemented by subsequent governments until the end of the 1930s.¹⁵

The introduction of mandatory middle-school education (i.e., several grades above elementary education, known as *pro-gymnasium*), was the main and lasting nucleus of the educational reform, together with the building up of schools in the villages. The attempt to simplify Bulgarian orthography, though reasonable, was revoked after the Agrarians’ fall (only to be reintroduced after 1944). The law for the water syndicates facilitated the use of the water resources for purposes of irrigation and electricity. The promotion of the cooperatives (through credit) was a state policy even before, but reached a peak during Agrarian rule and was combined with lower taxation; moreover, the Agrarian Union tried to take control of the cooperative sector. The attempt to introduce a state monopoly (Grain Consortium) on the buying and trading of grain through the cooperatives at prices favorable for the producers, which affected the big commercial firms, was repealed at the insistence of the Inter-Allied Commission (of the Entente).

Other reforms, though socially motivated, proved to be ill-conceived or hard to implement, not to mention that their meaning and motives were often distorted. Thus the decentralizing reform of health care actually put an unbearable burden on the financially weak communes. The law for mobile peace justices obliged them to tour the rural districts (so that justice could be accessible) and prohibited defense lawyers from appearing in the courts of peace. Along with the prohibition of private practice for law-

¹⁴ The author of the idea of “labor property” is the Agrarian leader Raiko Daskalov. He claims to have come to it while in prison in 1916–1917. See Raiko Daskalov, *Borba za zemya* (Struggle for land) (Sofia, 1923), 3–4.

¹⁵ On the development of this reform, Ivan Ganev, *Agrarnata reforma v chuzhbina i u nas* (The agrarian reform abroad and in Bulgaria) (Sofia, 1946).

yers elected to the National Assembly, this law provoked the juridical “estate’s” anger and resentment toward the Agrarians. The introduction of local referendums for the appointment of teachers in elementary and middle schools proved to be unpractical and introduced party biases (the Agrarians dismissed communist teachers). There was also the unconstitutional law for alleviating the housing problem, which established norms for living space in the cities and envisioned the “condensing” of private and state offices and of families with above-norm living space to make room for needy persons (often those affiliated with the new regime). A progressive income tax was tried as an experiment; though socially just, it could not be properly assessed and collected, given the level of accounting and record-keeping; it also opened the door for bribes and arbitrariness. Finally, the promotion of culture through law was combined with censorship (especially against communist publications). Local government was the only major area in which the Agrarian Union did not pass a law, though in practice and as a consequence of other laws it increased its authority (but also the interference of the local Agrarian party cells—*druzhbi*). The legislation of the Agrarian Union in general was very radical and encroached upon strong interests. But many of the feverishly passed laws were technically deficient, which led to weaknesses of implementation.

Even more radical than the legislation were some administrative measures and especially the unbridled populist rhetoric and gestures that distinguished Agrarian rule. In his improvised speeches and his writings, Stamboliiski used vitriolic language against the political parties, the bourgeoisie, the bureaucracy, the intelligentsia, some professions (especially lawyers and traders), and against the towns in general. Characteristic of the regime were threats, roughness, and occasional acts of violence. Thus the politicians and activists of the political opposition on their way to a protest meeting in Tŭrnovo were taken off the train and maltreated by the so-called “Orange Guard”—a paramilitary formation of the Agrarian Union. The leading politicians of the former governments were sent to trial (after a referendum) for improperly conducting the wars. This response gratified the feeling of justice, but violated the law and the constitution (with a retroactive law, biased composition of the court, and political interference with its proceedings). There was an untactful and potentially dangerous attitude towards the army officers, who were deeply affected by the demobilization and the drastic reduction of the army (required by the Neuilly peace treaty) but capable of self-organization and armed action. The conflict with the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organiza-

tion (IMRO) was especially sharp, caused by Stamboliiski's policy of rapprochement with Yugoslavia and his agreement to curb the activities of IMRO on Bulgarian territory. Actually, the government lost the war against IMRO, which formed a "state within a state" in the Bulgarian part of Macedonia. To the Agrarians' record, one can also add the encroachment upon the academic autonomy of the university (and a conflict with the professors) and the attacks on the Church Synod. Thus the Agrarian regime antagonized virtually all political forces and influential public circles outside its own peasant base, which for its part was moving leftwards toward the poorer peasants.¹⁶ To quote Stamboliiski himself: "Do not be amazed if I tell you that our rule is not a rule, but a war, a true internal and external war: a war against railway workers, a war against brigands in the forests, a war against brigands in the towns, a war against teachers, a war against parties, a war against the Military League, a war against hatred and mistrust outside us, a war against the bureaucracy, a war against the Saint Synod. Tell me with whom in Bulgaria we have not quarreled yet, tell me against whom we have not started a war, so that we may start it all the sooner."¹⁷

In the end the Agrarian Union was overthrown by a coup d'état of the Military League (a conspiratorial organization of army officers), while civil responsibility was assumed by a political organization called the National Concord (*Naroden sgovor*) with the tacit agreement of the monarch. There followed the assassination or imprisonment of leading figures of the Agrarian Union and a brutal suppression of Stamboliiski's adherents, who rose in support of him (the June Uprising of 1923), and of the communist uprising in September 1923.

Interpretation and Assessments

The various interpretations and assessments of Agrarian rule in historiography are usually presented as descriptions of an objective state of affairs, but they presuppose a standpoint from which it is viewed. The prevailing

¹⁶ Luyben Berov, "Sotsialna osnova na rezhima na BZNS prez 1918–1923 g." (Social basis of the regime of the Agrarian Union in 1918–1923), *Istoricheski pregled* 28, no. 4 (1972): 45–58, esp. 57–58.

¹⁷ Quoted from Konstantin Katsarov, *60 godini zhiviyana istoriya* (Sixty years of history lived through) (Montreaux, Switzerland: Promidrin, 1970), 313. Katsarov was a lawyer and after 1944 emigrated to Switzerland.

assessments of the Agrarian Union come from a communist point of view, taken up in the (older) historiography. The communist attitude itself has changed from a “dogmatic” position (that of the “narrow” socialists) to a more flexible and pragmatic (“Leninist”) position. The difference between the two is not as great as it claims to be, but instead is “tactical”: the “dogmatic” rejection of relations with the Agrarian Union on the part of the (rather legalistic) “narrow” socialists was replaced at a certain point by a turning of the Bolshevized socialists (communists) toward it in looking for an ally; hence the more favorable assessments of the peasant party in the historiography. However, in this case the measuring rod applied in judging the Agrarians (their ideology and reforms) is still more radical: anything short of a total revolutionary destruction of the capitalist economic order and of bourgeois democracy and a struggle for socialism under communist guidance is unsatisfactory. Socialism itself is understood on the Bolshevik and Soviet model as a “dictatorship of the proletariat” under communist guidance with an economy based on nationalization of property, including land. From this point of view (and this standard), any attempt at reforming the existing system appears insufficiently revolutionary, partial, and inconclusive.¹⁸ Let us consider in more detail the changing attitude toward the peasants and their Agrarian Union in the historical “reality” (i.e., the contemporary debates) and in the historiography.

The “narrow socialists” of Dimitŭr Blagoev denied in principle any revolutionary potential of the peasants as a petty (and middle) bourgeois class; to them only the “peasant proletariat” could be revolutionary, and only if under socialist guidance. A peasant party could only be bourgeois and reactionary; if it were in government, it would behave no differently from the other bourgeois parties and would not be capable of implementing the radical socialist program. Later on the “narrow” would be criticized by Georgi Dimitrov for their “dogmatism”—meaning that they did not use their opportunities (the Agrarian offers of cooperation) to get to power. The “narrow” standpoint was reproduced later on in the historiography, especially in the early 1950s, and traces from it are found even later. In actual fact, even though this standpoint was later labeled “narrow

¹⁸ Ironically, the Agrarian Union proved to be more revolutionary after World War I, when it provided leadership to the Radomir (Soldiers’) Rebellion while Dimutŭr Blagoev refused the participation of the (“narrow”) socialists. The Agrarians were also the first to rise in arms after the coup d’état on June 9, 1923, while the communists took a stand of “neutrality.” But the communists made up for the revolutionary delay in the September Uprising of 1923 and in the subsequent “civil war.”

socialist” and dogmatic, it was shared by the Comintern (and the Krestintern, or Red Peasant International) in the 1920s and early 1930s. The historiographical assessments thus distort the previous attitudes of the Communist Party toward the Agrarians.

A historiographical example of this standpoint is the Soviet historian M.A. Birman, who ascribes to the Agrarian Union a directly reactionary role in the concluding stage of the “revolutionary crisis” (i.e., after the Radomir Rebellion) and blames it for serving as a tool of the bourgeoisie in diverting the discontented masses, and the peasants of low class consciousness in particular, from the path of revolution.¹⁹ In the same spirit Yaroslav Yotsov and other authors criticize the Agrarian government for ideological and other mistakes and illusions. According to them the petty (peasant) bourgeoisie and its leaders were wavering and inconsistent, and the big bourgeoisie remained in control and fully dominated the economy. The Agrarian Union, though it established a rule of the peasant petty bourgeoisie, is interpreted as a representative of the “middle peasants” (meant pejoratively), and its strands and leaders are seen in class terms as representatives of various social strata: of the rich peasants, the poor peasants, and Stamboliiski himself—“of the middle peasants grown rich.”²⁰ This presumably “narrow socialist,” meaning strongly negative, perspective toward the Agrarian Union is an extreme and soon became an anachronism in the historiography. It coincides with the postwar Stalinist years, and one can suppose that the negative depiction of the peasants and their party in the historiography reflected peasant resistance to the collectivization that was taking place in those years.²¹

¹⁹ M.A. Birman, *Revolutsionnaya situatsiya*, esp. 311–312, 318–319, 331, 377, 379. Similarly about the agrarian parties of the “Green International” in general: M.M. Goranovich, *Krakh zel'onogo internatsionala 1921–1938* (The failure of the Green International, 1921–1938) (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo “Nauka,” 1967).

²⁰ Yaroslav Yotsov, “Upravlenieto na Zemedelskiya süyuz (1919–1923)” (The rule of the Agrarian Union, 1919–1923), *Istoricheski pregled* 6, no. 3 (1950): 305–327, esp. 325–327. Continued in *Istoricheski pregled* 7, no. 3 (1951): 249–282, esp. 252–253, 258–259, 273. *Istoriya na Bülğariya v dva toma* (History of Bulgaria in two volumes), vol. 2 (Sofia: Nauka i izkustvo, 1955), 422–455 (the chapter by Yaroslav Yotsov).

²¹ See the critique of this historiography by Veselin Hadzhinikolov, “Nyakoi problemi na koalitsionnoto pravitelstvo na Aleksandür Stamboliiski (oktomvri 1919–mai 1920)” (Some problems of the coalition government of Aleksandür Stamboliiski, October 1919–May 1920). In *Aleksandür Stamboliiski. Zhivot. Delo. Zaveti* (Aleksandür Stamboliiski. Life. Deeds. Legacy) (Sofia: Izdatelstvo na BZNS, 1980), 249–270, esp. 251–253. Such negative assessments of the Agrarian Union are presented as “un-Leninist,” and statements of Georgi Dimitrov are used to defend the Agrarians.

More characteristic of the historiography is another position connected with Dimitrov (and referring to Lenin) with the characteristic militant revolutionary attitude, but more “flexible” and recognizing some strengths and merits of the Agrarians (who were neutralized in the meantime and drawn into the building of socialism). In fact, this standpoint reflects the communist tactics of a “united front” (later “popular front”) with the peasants and the agrarian parties, which was retained as phraseology after the communist takeover (while, in reality, the Agrarian Union was being suppressed).

In this “revision” some aspects of the interpretation and the assessment of the Agrarian regime did not change, especially the view on political power. The idea of a purely “peasant rule” (or Agrarian rule), without coalition partners, would always be rejected as “unscientific” and mistaken. The same is true of the “estatist theory,” which argued for a monopoly of the Agrarian Union to represent the peasants, that is, the (bulk of the) “people.” Even the question of the preservation of small-scale private property was not such an anathema for the communists as the question of power. They did not recognize any rule other than the “dictatorship of the proletariat” under the guidance of the Communist Party, while the Agrarian Union and the peasants were allies in a supporting role in a “worker-peasant alliance” oriented toward communist goals, in other words, socialism on the Soviet model.

To sum up, the Agrarian Union and its ideology look the following way through Leninist-Dimitrovist lenses: it is a leftist political force, but not sufficiently radical and revolutionary. This is because it reflects the interests and aspirations of the petty (and partly the middle) rural bourgeoisie, with its characteristic waverings and hesitation between the proletariat and the (big) bourgeoisie. As a party of the petty bourgeoisie, the Agrarian Union is in favor of private property, even if it is small-scale property, and hence of capitalism (Lenin’s words are often cited that the petty bourgeois elements constantly generate capitalism). However, it is an illusion that capitalism can be reformed in favor of the petty bourgeoisie (the peasant smallholders) or that there is some “third way” or “middle ground” between capitalism and socialism. Accordingly a “rule of the peasants” (i.e., of the Agrarian Party) is not viable politically. It is doomed to failure because of its intermediate class nature between the main and diametrically opposed classes (proletariat and capitalists) and because of the “halfway” character of its reforms and goals.²² The petty bourgeoisie

²² For example: Yono Mitev, *Fashistkiyat prevrat na Deveti yuni 1923 i Yunskoto antifashistko vustanie* (The fascist coup d’état on June 9, 1923, and the June anti-fascist uprising)

is under threat from left and right and hence cannot keep political power on its own and for long; only the rule of the bourgeoisie or of the proletariat can be stable and durable. The proletariat dictatorship under communist guidance is solid—in fact, definitive—because it completes the revolutionary transformation of the society (and abolishes the capitalist class). In a predominantly peasant society like Bulgaria's (as in pre-revolutionary Russia), the success of the proletariat revolution requires a worker-peasant alliance directed by the Communist Party. The peasants are not a unitary "estate" (as the Agrarians believe), but differentiated in classes; hence part of them can be attracted to the socialist cause. The union between the workers and the peasants could not be realized during the Agrarian regime. This was the fault of Stamboliiski, but also of the Socialist Party, which was still attached to the old dogmas and undergoing a painful process of Bolshevization, meaning that it had not yet become flexible in its "tactics" toward its allies and the peasants in particular.

The Agrarian regime attempted some anti-capitalist measures, especially against capital and big business, but did not touch the foundations of capitalism—private property—because the party wanted to preserve it, even if in the form of small-scale property. The reforms of the regime were limited half-measures, with the authors differing as to just how much. Still, the regime was "progressive," and there existed a broad democracy (broader than the bourgeois democracy), measured also by the fact that the communists were allowed to engage in intensive legal activities and propaganda. Moreover, the regime evolved to the left after the prevalence of the leftist forces (Stamboliiski and some even more radical young people around him) and the elimination of the "rightists" from the leadership of the Agrarian Union. After its inevitable downfall, the Agrarian Union reconsidered its views, parallel with the new attitude of the Communist Party toward the peasants and their party. Thus it became possible to establish an alliance between the workers and the peasants under communist leadership, which passed through various forms, such as

ing), second revised edition (Sofia: Izdatelstvo na BZNS, 1973), 35; Hristo Hristov, "Velikata oktomvriiska," 18; Petko Stoichev, "Aleksandŭr Stamboliiski—ideolog na drebnoselskata demokratsiya" (Aleksandŭr Stamboliiski—ideologist of the peasant smallholder democracy), *Istoricheski pregled* 31, no. 1 (1975), 3–30, esp. 14–15. Still more dogmatic is the account of the Russian author A.N. Kirshevskaya, "Reformy pravitel'stva Zemledelcheskogo soyuza v Bolgarii i ikh krakh" (The reforms of the government of the Agrarian Union in Bulgaria and their failure), *Uchenye zapiski Instituta slavyanovedeniya* vol. 10 (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Akademii nauk SSSR, 1954), 5–71, esp. 10–11, 14–15, 70–71.

the “united front,” the “labor bloc,” the Popular Front, and the Fatherland Front, until victory was finally achieved on September 9, 1944.

This is the communist narrative in basic outline, in any case the invariable general frame, into which the facts of the rule of the Agrarian Union and its subsequent evolution—revealed in ever more detail—are placed.²³ However, there are nuances. The rule of the Agrarian Union and Stamboliiski’s reforms are seen in a quite sympathetic light by some authors in a sort of surreptitious “revision.” After pointing out the fallacies and errors of the Agrarian Union, they stress the positive features, such as the regime’s broad democratic character, its “progressiveness,” and even “combat-ready revolutionism” (*revolyutsionnost*), meaning a revolutionary attitude (though it is more common to speak of “reformism” mixed in various proportions with revolutionary tendencies), the defense of the interests of the working masses, sincere efforts toward social justice, hatred of the big bourgeoisie and its parties, serious encroachment upon capitalist interests, and that the “middle way” of the Agrarians was not that conciliatory or compromising. The comparison with the Taranist (i.e., peasant) party in Romania is brought to bear upon the much more radical (anti-capitalist) character of the Bulgarian peasant party.²⁴ Especially sympathetic alongside the democratic nature (“democratism”) and the “anti-capitalism” of the Agrarian Union are its courageous stand against the war, its anti-monarchical views,²⁵ its pacifism and desire for good relations with Bulgaria’s neighbors (especially with Yugoslavia), its readiness to restore diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union (in some variants even “sympathies” towards Soviet Russia).²⁶ At the same time,

²³ A very developed version: Dimitrina Petrova, *Samostoyatelnoto upravlenie*.

²⁴ T.F. Makovetskaya and T.A. Pokivailova, “Krest’yanskie partii v politicheskoi strukture Bolgarii i Rumynii v pervoi chetverti XX veka” (The peasant parties in the political structure of Bulgaria and Romania in the first quarter of the twentieth century), *Bol-kanskije issledovaniya*, vol. 9 (Moscow: Nauka, 1984), 199–222, esp. 220–221.

²⁵ While in office Stamboliiski preserved the monarchy but strongly curtailed the prerogatives of the monarch (Boris III was very young at that time). See Dimitrina Petrova, “BZNS i monarkhicheskiyat institut (1919–1924)” (BANU and the institution of the monarchy, 1919–1924), *Istoricheski pregled* 45, no. 4 (1989): 17–33.

²⁶ Dimităr Kosev, *Septemvriiskoto vŭstanie 1923* (The September Uprising of 1923) (Sofia: Nauka i izkustvo, 1973), esp. 58, 69; Yono Mitev, *Fashistkiyat prevrat*, 28–41, esp. 32, 34; Hristo Hristov, “Aleksandăr Stamboliiski v novata i nai-novata istoriya na Bŭlgariya” (Aleksandăr Stamboliiski in the modern and contemporary history of Bulgaria), in *Aleksandăr Stamboliiski. Zhivot, delo, zaveti*, 21–63, esp. 43, 60; Dimităr Dimitrov, “Vozhd na BZNS i glaven redaktor na v. ‘Zemedelsko zname’” (Leader of BANU and editor-in-chief of the newspaper “Zemedelsko zname”), in *Aleksandăr*

one can feel the lenience of the “revisionist” authors toward the mistakes and illusions of the Agrarian Union, which would be expiated with blood after its downfall and would be corrected by establishing an alliance with the proletariat and the Communist Party.

Within this general framework, several aspects attract historians’ attention. First of all—how democratic and how revolutionary was the regime (and in what sense), and what is the relation between the two? As mentioned previously, the Agrarian regime conceived of itself as the widest possible “rule of the people” (*narodovlastie*). According to some historians—quite in agreement with these claims—although the rule of the Agrarian Union remained politically within the frames of “bourgeois democracy,” it broadened it to the fullest possible extent.²⁷ According to others, it went even beyond the confines of bourgeois democracy in the direction of a still broader democracy and presented a “a kind of popular (*narodno*) rule.”²⁸ The grounds for such a judgment are, apparently, the mass (peasant) social base, the measures against the big bourgeoisie, and the democratic and social motivation of most laws (implicitly also the freedom of action of the Communist Party during the Agrarian regime). The understanding of the regime as deeply democratic is not based on a

Stamboliiski. Zhivot, delo, zaveti, 85–112, esp. 109; Kūnyu Kozhukharov, *Būlgarskiyat zemedelski naroden sŭyuz v minaloto i dneshnite zadachi* (The Bulgarian Agrarian National Union in the past and today’s tasks) (Sofia: Izdatelstvo na BZNS, 1956), 120, 132; Kūnyu Kozhukharov, “Za haraktera i nasokite na samostoyatelnoto zemedelsko upravlenie (1920–1923)” (On the character and the orientation of the one-party Agrarian rule, 1920–1923), *Istoricheski pregled*, 26, no. 3 (1970): 32–44, esp. 38, 40, 44; Rashko Ivanov, “Ikonomikata v ideologiyata i politikata na samostoyatelnoto upravlenie na Būlgarskiya zemedelski naroden sŭyuz (1920–1923)” (The economy and ideology in the politics of the one-party rule of the Bulgarian Agrarian National Union, 1920–1923), *Ikonomicheska misŭl* 17, no. 9 (1973): 49–58; Nedyu Nedev, *Aleksandŭr Stamboliiski i zagovorŭt* (Aleksandŭr Stamboliiski and the conspiracy) (Sofia: Izdatelstvo na BZNS, 1984), esp. 335–336, 338–341, 343.

²⁷ This formulation was asserted by Yaroslav Yotsov, *Istoriya na Būlgariya v tri toma* (History of Bulgaria in three volumes), vol. 3 (Sofia: Nauka i izkustvo, 1964), 70; Yaroslav Yotsov, “Sotsialno-ikonomicheskiyat oblik na Būlgariya 1919–1923” (The social-economic outlook of Bulgaria, 1919–1923), *Izvestiya na Instituta po istoriya*, vol. 20, 1968, 5–49, esp. 32; Yaroslav Yotsov, “Sŭvetska Rusiya i Būlgariya (1920–1923)” (Soviet Russia and Bulgaria, 1920–1923), in *Oktomvriiskata revolyutsiya*, ed. Hristo Hristov, 133–169, esp. 142–143. Much later also Petko Stoichev, “Aleksandŭr Stamboliiski,” 20–22. Stoichev takes seriously the Agrarian idea of a “rule of law” and considers deviations from it atypical.

²⁸ Dimitrina Petrova, *Samostoyatelnoto upravlenie*, 409; Aleksandŭr Veleŭ, *Glavni reformi*, 6, 165; Rashko Ivanov, “Ikonomikata v ideologiyata,” 54.

juridical and institutional concept of democracy, apart from the general fact that it operated within the limits of the parliamentary system.

One author, Evgeni Tanchev, attempted to define in institutional-juridical terms the democratic character of the Agrarian Union's rule. According to him, in its ideas and practices it represented the most advanced parliamentary system and elevated the National Assembly (and the principle of popular sovereignty) to supremacy. The parliamentarism of Stamboliiski approached the "convent (Jacobin) system," in which the executive stood entirely under the control of the supreme representative assembly, acting simply as the instrument of its will, and the separation of powers was weakened and even rejected. The broadening of the "rule of the people" after the failure of the Radomir Rebellion took place in an "evolutionary" legal way, that is, by applying the principle of election "from the bottom up" (its thorough application would mean a "presidential republic"), the use of referendum, the actual curtailing of the powers of the monarch pointing toward a republic, and the strengthening of local government. Tanchev admits that this goes beyond the "classical" bourgeois parliamentary regime and that there were also "digressions" from the typical parliamentary system, namely the ripening idea of Stamboliiski and the leftists in the Agrarian Union about a "peasant dictatorship" (over the big bourgeoisie); the principle of the imperative mandate (i.e., that the Agrarian deputies should have mandatory instructions by the voters, in violation of the Tŭrnovo constitution); the idea that the parliamentary vote of non-confidence should lead to legal persecution; moreover, the idea that the Agrarian cabinet ministers and deputies should be responsible to the supreme organs of the Agrarian Union (and not only to the National Assembly). On all those points the "right wing" within the Agrarian Union opposed the leftists, denouncing them as symptoms of dictatorship.²⁹ Still, Tanchev presents these violations of "classical parliamentarism" (designated in class terms as "bourgeois parliamentarism") as an evolution of the representative system itself toward a still broader democracy. The highest form of democracy would be the Soviet republic, which stands in this respect "above any bourgeois-democratic republic." Moreover, "even the least developed form of rule of the socialist state is more democratic than the most developed bourgeois form of government."³⁰

²⁹ Evgeni Tanchev, *Dŭrzhavno-pravnite vŭzgleđi na Aleksandŭr Stamboliiski* (The state-juridical views of Aleksandŭr Stamboliiski) (Sofia: Izdatelstvo na BZNS, 1984), esp. 140–141, 150–161, 170–177, 182–187, 215–216.

³⁰ Evgeni Tanchev, *Dŭrzhavno-pravnite*, 175–176, 183–184.

This author (a lawyer) can hardly be accused of legal naïveté on the issues of representative democracy. Rather, he consciously accepts the Leninist-Stalinist doctrine of socialist democracy (based on the “dictatorship of the proletariat”) as a higher form of democracy according to the crude logic: a dictatorship of the majority (or of the progressive class) over the minority is democracy; moreover, it is good and just, because it is directed against the exploiter classes and introduces social justice. Also from Lenin comes the emphasis on the inevitably class character of the democracy, in which classical (liberal) democracy is the expression of the domination, and even the dictatorship, of the bourgeoisie. From this point of view, the state and its political system cannot stand “above class” and serve to mediate and balance interests, but are always an instrument of class domination, and the choice is only whether that domination is by the bourgeoisie or by the proletariat.

It is worth noting that Stamboliiski himself and the members of the so-called “Committee on Peasant Dictatorship” came close to the Leninist understanding of the dictatorship—of course, a peasant dictatorship of the Agrarian Union—as a guarantee for the “rule of the people.” The reasoning here as well is that the peasant majority dominates the minority of its enemy (the big bourgeoisie)—a very simplistic and purely quantitative understanding of democracy.³¹ Perhaps this is the most important (and, until the fall of communism, unmentioned) influence of the October Revolution upon the Agrarian Union—its “Bolshevization” and drift toward dictatorship, but a peasant one.

Among the analyses of Agrarian rule, the works of Stefan Radulov stand out, argued in Leninist terms and ideas.³² In contrast to most other authors, he asserts the radicalism of the Agrarian government and views it as dictatorship in essence and as a tendency. He states that it was a “dictatorship of the petty bourgeoisie,” which used the state as an instrument of

³¹ For example, the article by Stamboliiski’s secretary Stoyan Kalüchev, “Diktatura,” (Dictatorship), *Zemedelsko zname*, no. 79, June 29, 1922; Tsvyatko Avramov, “Diktatura,” (The dictatorship), *Mladezhko zname*, no. 46, September 3, 1922. Connected with this is Mikhail Genovski’s testimony that Stamboliiski and the activists of the Committee on Peasant Dictatorship around him were familiar with the “dialectics” between a full-fledged “rule of the people” and dictatorship. See Mikhail Genovski, *Aleksandür Stamboliiski – otblizo i otdaleko* (Aleksandür Stamboliiski—from close up and from afar) (Sofia: Izdatelstvo na BZNS, 1982), 136–137, 142–145.

³² Aptly applied, the Leninist concepts are quite appropriate for analyzing acute crises and revolutionary phenomena, and for that reason for the semi-revolutionary Agrarian rule in the postwar situation in particular.

achieving its ideals of petty bourgeois (peasant smallholder) “labor” democracy, just as bourgeois democracy is, according to Lenin, a “dictatorship of the bourgeoisie.”³³ Here the Leninist idea is evoked that there does not exist a neutral “above-class” state and that the state (in a class society) can only be a dictatorship of a certain class, whether of the bourgeoisie or of the proletariat, in this case of the petty bourgeoisie. Whatever one thinks of such a concept of the state in the abstract (it is problematic, to say the least), one can argue its adequacy for the crisis situation in Bulgaria after the wars, when the state hardly looked like a neutral arbiter, but rather as a defender of class (or group) interests and director of policies against the interests of other groups.

Stefan Radulov asserts, or rather implies, that the Agrarians went very far with their “third way.” This was a “unique political experiment in the postwar development of the world,” and it went “far beyond the notions of petty bourgeois reformism known at the time,” presenting a “serious breach in the class domination of the bourgeoisie in Bulgaria” (though temporary and without a future of its own).³⁴ Radulov offers a thorough analysis of the ideology and the practical measures of the Agrarian Union and of its intentions precisely as a “breach” in the established political system of bourgeois democracy, accompanied by an encroachment upon the economic interests of the bourgeoisie, especially big business. He points to the marginalization of the National Assembly (exactly the opposite of what the previously mentioned author said, and quite true) and the elevation of the governing bodies of the Agrarian Union above it, which found expression in the accountability of the cabinet to the party congress (instead of to parliament), the interference of the local Agrarian *druzhbi* (party cells) in local administration, and the formation of an armed party

³³ Stefan Radulov, “Meropriyatnaya na zemedelskiya rezhim (1919–1923)” (The measures of the Agrarian regime, 1919–1923), *Nauchni trudove na Akademiyata za obshtestveni nauki i sotsialno upravlenie na Tsentralniya Komitet na BKP. Seriya Istoriya*, vol. 113 (Sofia, 1979), 7–81, esp. 8, 71, 76; Stefan Radulov, *Upravlenieto na BZNS*, 87, 111; Stefan Radulov, “Ideinite osnovi na zemedelskiya rezhim” (The ideological bases of the Agrarian regime), *Nauchni trudove na Akademiyata za obshtestveni nauki i sotsialno upravlenie na Tsentralniya Komitet na BKP. Seriya Istoriya*, vol. 105 (Sofia, 1979), 67. In the same sense also T.F. Makovetskaya and T.A. Pokivailova, “Krest’yanskii partii,” 214.

³⁴ Stefan Radulov, *Upravlenieto na BZNS*, 6, 401–403, citation on 6. In his previous works Radulov asserted that the Agrarians were less revolutionary in that they did not touch the foundations of the capitalist order, but only its peak—big business. See Stefan Radulov, “Ideinite osnovi,” 66–73; Stefan Radulov, “Meropriyatnaya na zemedelskiya,” 71–75.

force (the Orange Guard). The “estatist theory” itself justified the Agrarian Union’s claims on state power in its capacity as an organization of the majority of the population, and the acclaimed “rule of the people” had to produce a deep transformation of the political system in this direction. In fact, the Agrarian Union’s efforts to gain a monopoly on power “contained in itself some elements of totalitarianism.”³⁵

Hardly less serious was the damage to the economic interests of capital and big business by Agrarian etatism (regulation, establishment of state monopolies, expansion of state property) and by the cooperatives, interpreted radically as a path for the transformation of property and of the social order in general at the expense of capitalism.³⁶ In contrast to most socialist authors, Radulov takes the revolutionary potential of the peasants (or petty bourgeoisie) very seriously. Finally, he points to the tendency of Stamboliiski’s government to become more radical over time and in the dynamics of exacerbation of the conflict with the bourgeoisie, hence the prevalence of the extreme leftist current within the Agrarian Union. This tendency found expression in the work on a new constitution to strengthen the “rule of the people” (in practice, one-party rule) and the intention for a new and even more radical campaign against capitalism, which included the potential nationalization (or “cooperativization”) of the insurance firms and the industrial enterprises, state control over banking and credit, and state monopolies in the tobacco trade.³⁷

The movement of the Agrarian Union toward a (party) dictatorship is attested to, apart from the debasing of parliamentarism and the circumvention of the state administration in some matters, by the formation of the already-mentioned “Committee on Peasant Dictatorship” (Krum Popov, Stoyan Kalūchev, Dimitŭr Kemalov) and of a paramilitary force called the “Orange Guard” (though very inefficient), as well as by the resolution of the Sixteenth Congress of the Agrarian Union for establishing a peasant dictatorship in case of emergency. Also notable in this context are the Agrarians’ manipulation of the electoral system and of elections, as well as Stam-

³⁵ Stefan Radulov, “Meropriyatnata na zemedelskiya,” 9–28; Stefan Radulov, “Ideinite osnovi,” 27–47, 62–63, citation on 47; Stefan Radulov, *Upravlenieto na BZNS*, 99–116, 136–139, 404.

³⁶ Stefan Radulov, “Ideinite osnovi,” 14–27; Stefan Radulov, *Upravlenieto na BZNS*, 89–98, 116–120. On the radical cooperativism and etatism of the Agrarian Union also Lyuben Berov, “Vŭzgledi na levitsata na BZNS otnosno oblika na bŭdeshtoto obshtestvo” (Views of the leftists of BANU on the outlook for the future society), *Istoričeski pregled* 46, no. 3 (1990): 3–22.

³⁷ Stefan Radulov, *Upravlenieto na BZNS*, 366–369.

boliiski's self-assured statements that the Agrarian Union would rule for decades. Accusations of "orange Bolshevism" and of a lurch toward dictatorship, though they came from political adversaries, were not unjustified.³⁸

On the other hand, in its rule the Agrarian Union did not establish a full-fledged dictatorship, and Stamboliiski himself restrained the extreme leftists, though he was influenced by them. The adherence to parliamentary forms, in spite of everything, and the credulity and frankness of Stamboliiski himself (who was not a man for underhanded actions and conspiracies) facilitated the coup d'état and the violent overthrow. This is especially true as the Agrarian Union (unlike the communists later on) did not have a disciplined party organization as an instrument of dictatorship and was neither willing nor able to exercise real terror.³⁹

A problem that attracted a lot of attention is the influence (the so-called "reflection") of the October Revolution on the Agrarian Union and on the views of his leaders.⁴⁰ The largely preconceived idea is to demonstrate the sympathy of the Agrarians toward the Russian Revolution and to imply that they came quite close to accepting the ideas and policies of the Bolsheviks. In fact, the Agrarians followed closely what was going on in Russia and were initially sympathetic as the Bolsheviks issued the decrees on peace and on land and abolished the monarchy. But they soon became

³⁸ The tendency toward dictatorship was noted by the Agrarian rightists: Marko Turlakov, *Istoriya, printsipi i taktika na Bŭlgarskiya zemedelski naroden sŭyuz* (History, principles, and tactics of the Bulgarian Agrarian National Union) (Stara Zagora, 1929), 201; Dimitŭr Dragiev, *Edna politicheska izpoved* (A political confession) (Sofia, 1919), 8–9, 75–76. The Agrarian Union was accused of "orange Bolshevism," as attested to by Mikhail Genovski, *Pŭtyat na zemedelskoto sdruzhavane. Istoricheski ocherk* (The path of the Agrarian organization. A historical outline) (Sofia: Zemedelsko sŭyuzno izdatelstvo "Al. Stamboliiski," 1947), 71. Stamboliiski himself stated that if necessary, an Agrarian dictatorship would be introduced using the methods of Lenin and Trotsky, if the Agrarians' opponents made use of them. See Aleksandŭr Stamboliiski, *Zemedelsko upravlenie. Pŭrva godina. Petnadesetchasova rech na ministŭr-predsedatelya Al. Stamboliiski pred delegatite na XVI redoven semedelski kongres* (Agrarian rule. First year. Fifteen-hour speech of Premier Stamboliiski before the delegates of the Sixteenth Agrarian Congress) (Sofia, 1921), 179–180.

³⁹ David Mitrany notes the contradiction between radical social reforms and the determination of the peasant parties in Eastern Europe to remain true to democratic principles, which made them victims of a vengeful opposition. See David Mitrany, *Marx against the Peasant: A Study in Social Dogmatism* (New York: Collier Books, 1961), 141–142.

⁴⁰ Panayot Panayotov, *Vliyanieto na Velikiya oktomvri vŭrkhu ideino-politicheskoto razvitiie na BZNS* (The influence of Great October on the ideological-political development of BANU) (Sofia: Izdatelstvo na BZNS, 1978); M.A. Birman, *Revolŭtsionnaya situatsiya*, 372–373.

disappointed with the Bolshevik dictatorship, and they especially loathed collectivization and the violence against the peasants, the destruction brought by the Russian Civil War, and the privileging of industry. In contrast with the Bolshevik model, they presented their Agrarian model, of which they were proud.⁴¹ Moreover, they considered their own reforms a means to avert a Bolshevik revolution and decrease the attraction of extremism in Bulgaria.⁴² This had a tactical significance as well: in implementing their too-radical reforms, the Agrarian Union exploited the bourgeoisie's fear of the still more radical Bolshevism.

On the other hand, the Agrarians were certainly borrowing from Bolshevik and Russian experience (the compulsory labor service, probably the labor principle in agriculture). And there are important analogies and "affinities" in spite of the antagonism, such as the revolutionary style, the *druzhbi* (party cells) as similar to "soviets," and most importantly, the idea of a "peasant dictatorship" (instead of "dictatorship of the proletariat").⁴³ It is exactly in such parallels that the considerable revolutionary potential of the Agrarian regime becomes apparent. But this is very different from what the communist authors would like to see as a "reflection of October," namely not borrowings in essence, but rather sympathies of the Agrarians toward the Russian Bolsheviks and readiness to accept their ideas. One can thus affirm that most of the writings of this kind not only distort and misrepresent the attitudes of the Agrarians, but, in the end, rest upon a misunderstanding—substituting what they really borrowed for what they should have borrowed.

After 1989, the interpretation of the rule of the Agrarian Union as a road to peasant dictatorship was proposed by Stoicho Grüncharov and other authors. The Agrarian experiment was pointed out as a precedent of a communist party-state dictatorship.⁴⁴ But the measuring rod and the

⁴¹ Aleksandŭr Stamboliiski, *Zemedelsko upravlenie*, 151–154, 157–160, 179.

⁴² Ibid., 107. See also Mikhail Genovski, *Pŭtyat na zemedelskoto*, 69–71. From a communist perspective about Stamboliiski's animosity towards Bolshevism and the Soviet order, see Petko Kunin, *Vlianieto na Oktomvriiskata revolyutsiya, na leninizma za razvitiето na agrarno-selskiya vŭpros v Bŭlgariya 1919–1944* (The influence of the October Revolution and of Leninism on the development of the agrarian-peasant question in Bulgaria, 1919–1944) (Sofia: Partizdat, 1975), 38, 42.

⁴³ For example, Petko Stoichev, "Otnoshenieto na Aleksandŭr Stamboliiski kŭm Oktomvriiskata revolyutsiya i Sŭvetska Rusiya" (Aleksandŭr Stamboliiski's attitude towards the October Revolution and Soviet Russia), *Istoricheski pregled* 33, no. 4 (1977): 42–71.

⁴⁴ Elena Statelova and Stoicho Grüncharov, *Istoriya na nova Bŭlgariya*, 356–399, esp. 365–366, 390–394. See also Vasil Vasilev, "Aleksandŭr Stamboliiski i komitetŭt za selska diktatura" (Aleksandŭr Stamboliiski and the Committee on Peasant Dictatorship). In

value standard applied here is liberal democracy, not a revolution and a revolutionary regime.

The reassessment of the Agrarian regime as revolutionary is carried to the extreme by the Russian author K. Sem'onov, who regards it as a form of "social maximalism." The latter is defined as a choice of extreme (including revolutionary) means for the solving of social problems, in which the "organic" capitalist social-economic development is broken in the effort to build up a different social system in the name of "social justice." The Agrarian regime is juxtaposed with communist ideology and practice by selecting and emphasizing its extreme features: the messianic role of one social class (the peasants); irreconcilable opposition of the interests of one class ("estate") to the interests of the other classes; sharp confrontation of the rural with the urban; an effort to create a single-party regime; a gradual development of a cult of the leader; a purge of the rightist faction and a course toward a peasant dictatorship; thorough reform in every sphere; and plans for a complete nationalization of the means of production and a new society based on public and cooperative property. According to Sem'onov, all this casts doubt on the "petty bourgeois democratic nature" of the Agrarian regime, whose reformism was not liberal, but revolutionary and maximalist in character, and came close to social utopianism. In general, the Agrarian regime manifested social maximalism with a tendency for establishing a party dictatorship in the name of one class.⁴⁵ As can be seen, the one-sided treatment of the regime as democratic is replaced here by a no less one-sided treatment, which selectively underlines the revolutionary features of the regime at the expense of others. Furthermore, what was a tendency of the evolution of the regime is presented here as its "essence."

The rule of the Agrarian Union can also be discussed in terms of political populism, though this has hardly been done, apart from occasional references. In fact, many of this government's features fit the description of "populist democracy," with its characteristic radical-democratic ideal of "people's rule" by broadening the participation of the masses and practicing of "direct democracy" by referendum, public initiative (including

120 godini ot rozhdenieto na Aleksandŭr Stamboliiski (One hundred and twenty years since the birth of Aleksandŭr Stamboliiski) (Sofia, 1999), 45–65. I followed the same interpretation: Roumen Daskalov, *Bŭlgarskoto obshtestvo, 1878–1939* (Bulgarian society, 1878–1939), vol. 1 (Sofia: Gutenberg, 2005), 193–198.

⁴⁵ K.N. Sem'onov, "Rezhim BZNS—forma sotsial-maksimalizma? K postanovke problemy (The regime of BANU—a form of social-maximalism? Posing the problem), *Sovetskoe slavyanovedenie*, no. 6 (1991): 37–47.

legislative), the recall of elected officials (by a petition of the voters), and so on.⁴⁶ As we have seen, many statements and some measures of the Agrarian Union point in precisely this direction: a referendum (on the culprits of the wars), the idea of the deputies' binding (imperative) mandate, a possibility for early removal of officials (distorted because the Agrarian deputies had to give Stamboliiski resignation letters in advance), administrative decentralization, and all sorts of initiatives "from below." However, as pointed out by populism expert Margaret Canovan, a radical democracy of this kind and through such measures is very difficult to practice and has only rarely been implemented, most notably in Switzerland and partially and for a time in individual states of the United States. In conditions of underdevelopment, populist democracy, even if it originates from an authentic and strong activism "from below," easily degenerates into populist dictatorship, in which the "participation" becomes purely ostentatious, and the people are manipulated through flattering speeches and mass spectacles by a charismatic leader, who gradually turns (even if unwittingly) into a dictator. This seems to have been precisely the case with the Bulgarian Agrarian Union, which evolved from an incipient populist democracy toward a populist dictatorship, or rather presented a mixture of both from the very beginning, with a gradual increase of the second component.⁴⁷ The debates over whether Stamboliiski was a dictator reflect, in fact, exactly this evolution, which was noticed at the time by some "rightist" Agrarian activists. The direction toward populist dictatorship is also visible in the appeals to the peasants (who were "the people" here) across the established political elites and the system.

The political populism shows also in the style and the aesthetics of the Agrarian regime, which differed considerably from previous governments: mass rallies, mounted parades with the party banners, long speeches in

⁴⁶ Following M. Canovan, one can distinguish four types of political populism: populist dictatorship, populist democracy, reactionary populism, and populism of politicians. See Margaret Canovan, *Populism* (London: Junction Books, 1981), 13–15, 136–143, on the ideas and practices of populist democracy, in particular 192–199.

⁴⁷ Canovan treats the Bulgarian Agrarian Union only as an example of "agrarian populism," while her examples of political populism and populist dictatorship in particular come from Latin America (Peron). In my opinion, the rule of the Bulgarian Agrarians was also characterized by strong political populism as a mixture of populist democracy and populist dictatorship. The populist democracy in particular is attested to by the concept of "rule of the people" and the various democratic measures and initiatives "from below," especially by the authentic grassroots activism of the Agrarian movement, as well as by the fact that its leaders came from peasant circles, not from the established order.

front of crowds or before the Agrarian activists (Stamboliiski's speeches lasted for hours, in some cases more than ten hours), and the ostentatious accessibility of the Agrarian leaders (as close to the "people"). Adopting orange as its color, the Agrarian Party deployed it aggressively. In addition to the orange banners, there were public buildings and state automobiles painted in orange; orange paper and ink; and orange banknotes. This is symptomatic of a populist style and an effort to impress the masses. The (mostly improvised) speeches of Stamboliiski contained strong populist demagoguery: simplified notions of state and government; making the peasants believe that they could take part directly in administration; taking stock of the government's accomplishments at Agrarian party meetings (e.g., Stamboliiski's report on his hundred-day tour of Europe); and inciting the peasants against the city-dwellers, the intelligentsia (the "learned"), and some professions. To this one may add unrestrained self-praise and boasting about accomplishments and the assurances of a long-term rule.⁴⁸

The communist historiography on the Agrarian Union is cast exclusively in class terms, in which the bourgeoisie and the proletariat are the main classes and the peasants are seen as a "petty bourgeois" class in an intermediate position (or as heterogeneous and divided between the classes). But it is also possible to apply the "urban-rural" theoretical framework (and actual contemporary division) with an emphasis on the relatively homogeneous peasant outlook and interests, as in the "estatist" theory of Stamboliiski and in the agrarian ideology more generally. This is all the more justified as Bulgarian peasants were similar to one another not only in terms of livelihood and way of life, but also in their material (class) conditions—they were predominantly smallholders. The major conflict, then, is not between the (big) bourgeoisie and proletariat with peasants in between, but between the advanced towns (with better living conditions and higher material standards) and the backward "primitive" villages (where people lived a hard life). The misery of the peasants engendered a natural discontent against the towns and the state. The peasants viewed themselves (with some justification) as victims, exploited by usu-

⁴⁸ Such phenomena are mentioned by Agrarian activists themselves: Aleksandŭr Radolov, *Prevratŭt na 9 yuni i prestŭpnoto nekhaistvo* (The coup d'état on June 9 and the culpable negligence) (Sofia, 1931), 90–91; Marko Turlakov, *Istoriya, printsipi i taktika*, 194–196, 200–202, 205. See also the keen observations on the style and behavior of the Agrarian rulers in Konstantin Katsarov, *60 godini zhiviyana*, 212–213, 282–283, 286, 296. Also the contemporary historian Nikola Stanev, *Istoriya na nova Bŭlgariya 1878–1928* (History of modern Bulgaria, 1878–1928). (Sofia: Chipev, 1929), 507.

rers, mediating traders, lawyers, and by the state by taxes that went mostly for the bureaucracy and the army.

The peasants' needs and wants and their ideals were given expression by the agrarian (or peasantist) ideology, the Bulgarian version of which was worked out by the leaders of the Agrarian Union, most notably by Dragiev and Stamboliiski (and the later ideologues). Central to it are the promotion of peasant agriculture (as opposed to the privileging of industry), efforts toward a more even distribution of property in the name of social justice, the curtailing of bureaucratic and military expenditures, and pacifism. In the quite radical Bulgarian variant, it also involved the elaboration of a certain vision of a peasant political democracy resting upon small-scale (labor) property and a cooperative (and partly nationalized) economy. Characteristic of agrarianism is a certain idealization of the peasant way of life—the contrasting of peasant virtues to urban vices, of agrarian work to the mechanistic work in the factories, and so on.⁴⁹ Most fundamentally, it rests upon the preservation of the peasants (and the peasant way of life) in contemporary society as an ultimate value. Special efforts are made to argue and prove the economic advantages of the peasant economy as opposed to other agrarian regimes.⁵⁰

The Bulgarian Agrarian National Union was the radical mouthpiece for the peasant point of view, especially of the smallholders. Its rule—to take seriously its claim of a “third way”—was an attempt to assert another way of development, one prioritizing the neglected village and agriculture. Far from a desire to preserve a primitive peasant way of life, the goal was modernization of the village—its education, sanitation, health care, and electrification. The work of the peasants was to be facilitated through machines and other facilities, and the village's productivity was to be raised. The following words of Stamboliiski sketch the ideal of a modernized agrarian Bulgaria: “In twenty years Bulgaria will become a model of an agrarian state, whose towns and villages will get rid of the crooked muddy streets and the people's bloodsuckers. They will be provided with pure, healthy drinking water, with wooded parks, with modern chemical fertilizers, with telegraph and telephone and electric lighting. They will

⁴⁹ Aleksandŭr Stamboliiski, *Zemedelskite deitsi i tyakhnoto izrazhdane* (The Agrarian activists and their degeneration) (Sofia, 1919), esp. 15–29; Aleksandŭr Stamboliiski, *Zemedelsko upravlenie*, 151–154. Prokopi Kiranov, *Bŭlgarskoto zemedelsko dvizhenie. Idei, razvitie, delo* (The Bulgarian agrarian movement. Ideas, development, deeds). (Sofia, 1927), 143–149.

⁵⁰ Kŭnyu Kozhukharov, *Edro i drebno zemedelie* (Big and small agriculture) (Sofia, 1927), 34–65; Prokopi Kiranov, *Bŭlgarskoto zemedelsko*, 133–143.

have highly developed cooperatives, and a broad railway network with warehouses for grain and tobacco at every station. Every village will have its House for Agrarian Democracy, where lectures and movies will be presented and the peasants will be able to listen to the best speeches of the best orators on a gramophone disc.”⁵¹

In the theoretical framework of agrarianism, the reasons for the failure of Agrarian rule also look different and not so deterministic as in class terms. The explanations usually given include extremely unfavorable conditions after the war, the Agrarian Union cadres’ unpreparedness to govern, the influx of “alien” job-hunting elements from other parties (called “renamed Agrarians”), the corruption and power-madness of the Agrarian leaders, their false self-confidence and loss of touch with ordinary realities, ignorant and rude manners of administration, lack of respect for the state (especially of the local party cells toward the local government), and unnecessary confrontation with influential milieus and forces.⁵² Of course, the absence of an “alliance” of the peasants with the workers and of a “united front” of the Agrarians with the communists does not play a role in such accounts. And it is exactly the “intermediary” class position of the peasants and the Agrarian Union that one of its leading ideologues (Dimităr Dragiev) points out as an advantage (after the overthrow), namely to take a place in the political center and play a mediating and conciliatory role, to soften the struggles between labor and capital, and so on.⁵³

The sympathetic “agrarianist” vision of the Agrarian Union as representative of the just protest of the neglected or exploited peasants, and of agrarianism as a viable ideology and strategy of development, is under-represented in Bulgarian historiography, except for the contemporary writings of the Agrarian ideologues themselves (who also wrote some

⁵¹ Quoted from Stefan Gruev, *Korona ot trŭni. Tsaruvaneto na Boris III 1918–1943* (Sofia: Bulgarski pisatel, 1991), 109 (editorial from *Zemedelsko zname*, March 6, 1922). Original title: Stephane Groueff, *Crown of Thorns: The Reign of King Boris III, 1918–1943*. (Lanham, NY, and London: Madison Books, 1987, 76, in a somewhat different translation).

⁵² From the Agrarian authors Dimităr Dragiev, *Bŭlgarskiyat zemedelski naroden sŭyuz* (The Bulgarian Agrarian National Union) (Stara Zagora, 1926), esp. 88–101; Marko Turlakov, *Istoriya, printsipi, taktina*, 194–196, 200–202, 205; Aleksandăr Radolov, *Prevratŭt na 9 yuni*, 52–53, 90–91, 120–121; Prokopi Kiranov, *Bŭlgarskoto zemedelsko*, 72–75, 78–79. See also the memoirs of the leader of the Democratic Party, Aleksandăr Malinov, *Pod znaka na ostrasteni i opasni politicheski borbi* (Under the sign of embittered and dangerous political struggles) (Sofia: Hristo Botev, 1991), 87. Also Konstantin Katsarov, *60 godini zhiviyana*, 312–313, 322–324.

⁵³ Dragiev, Dimităr, *Bŭlgarskiyat zemedelski*, 51–52, 57–62.

early histories of the Agrarian Union). It is exemplified by the work of the American historian John Bell, who presents the ideology and the rule of the Agrarian Union in a positive light.⁵⁴ In the historiography on agrarianism in Eastern Europe, this perspective is found in the work of David Mitrany.⁵⁵ This is not to say that positive accounts of the Agrarian Union by (professional) Bulgarian historians are lacking, but they are from a different viewpoint and sympathize with its “democracy” or “revolutionary attitude,” not with the agrarianist ideas and vision of society.

The problem with a strongly positive agrarianist account is that during the rule of the Agrarian Union there was a sharp confrontation between village and town, between the Agrarian activists and the urban politicians and intelligentsia, and it led to a rough “revanche” of the village over the city.⁵⁶ This is how things were perceived (and experienced) by contemporary urban politicians, the bourgeoisie, and the intelligentsia. The same line was adopted by some historians, especially abroad. The strongly value-laden descriptions read thus: uncivilized storming of the towns by the peasants, semi-educated and uncouth Agrarian activists, wooden sticks and bullying in the streets, incompetence in the administration and the like, all negatively summarized in the term *druzhbashtina* (from *druzhba*, the Agrarians’ party cells), in the sense of uncivilized and rough rule.⁵⁷

The “third way” of agrarianism has also been discussed in connection with modernization, especially by foreign authors. The question is: were the Agrarians’ ideas and policies favorable to modernization? And more drastically: is progress compatible with the preservation of smallholder peasant agriculture? Some authors reject the modernization potential of a

⁵⁴ Bell, John, *Peasants in Power*, esp. 55–84.

⁵⁵ Mitrany, David, *Marx against the Peasant*.

⁵⁶ Strong pronouncements against the cities and Sofia in particular (compared on one occasion to Sodom and Gomorrah): Aleksandŭr Stamboliiski, *Zemedelsko upravlenie*, 43–44, 161, 163; Aleksandŭr Stamboliiski, *Zemedelskite deitsi*, 15–29.

⁵⁷ Ivan Peev-Plachkov, *Iz gŭnkite na minaloto. Spomeni i vpechatleniya* (In the folds of the past. Memoirs and impressions) (Sofia: Agres, 1994), 86–87. Also the “bourgeois” historians: Ivan Ormandzhiev, *Nova i nai-nova istoriya na bŭlgarskiya narod* (Modern and contemporary history of the Bulgarian nation) (Sofia, 1945), 575–576; Nikola Stanev, *Istoriya na nova*, 506–508. From among foreign historians, especially negative about the rule of the Agrarian Union is Joseph Rothschild, *East Central Europe between the Two World Wars* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1974), esp. 334–339, 341. Even an Agrarian author admits that the Agrarian movement was no stranger to “the villages’ not-always-rational hatred of the city”: Prokopi Kiranov, *Bŭlgarskoto zemedelsko*, 185.

smallholder agriculture.⁵⁸ Others view the modernization policies of the Agrarian regime very positively. As pointed out by John Bell, the Agrarian Union was not against industry as such, but only against industries that did not rest upon the national agricultural and other resources. Most importantly, the Agrarian Union was not making a choice between industry and agriculture, but wanted to develop both by curtailing military spending.⁵⁹ In between these two positions, the Oxford historian Richard Crampton characterizes the Agrarian Union as a moderate or “reluctant modernizer.”⁶⁰

Stamboliiski's policies on the national question attract special attention and are a source of controversy. After the lost wars (the Second Balkan War in 1913 and World War I), Bulgaria was isolated and surrounded by neighboring states that had gained at its expense from the wars, so the possibilities for a more active policy were minimal, and the loss of territories and population appeared permanent. Stamboliiski's foreign policy was pacifist, open to the world in an attempt to improve Bulgaria's image (he undertook a hundred-day tour of Europe to “break the ice”), and especially respectful to the victor states Great Britain and France. Bulgaria became a member of the newly created League of Nations and adhered strictly to its principles, not least because Bulgaria relied on it to protect the rights of Bulgarian minorities in neighboring states.

There were two options on the traditional “national question” (of the Ottoman irredenta), now transformed into a question of Bulgarian minorities in neighboring nation-states. One was rapprochement with Yugoslavia and, through it, with France and France's allies, and concentration of diplomatic efforts to make Greece cede an outlet to the Aegean (as promised in Article 48 of the Neuilly Peace Treaty). The other was rapprochement with Greece and Turkey, as well as with Italy, and exerting pressure on

⁵⁸ Hugh Seton-Watson, *Eastern Europe between the Wars, 1918–1941* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1945), 260; Doreen Warriner, *The Economics of Peasant Farming* (London, New York, and Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1939), 42. About contemporary and later debates on the productivity of the smallholder agriculture and the possibilities for modernization, see Roumen Daskalov, *Bŭlgarskoto obshtestvo*, vol. 2, 250–274.

⁵⁹ John Bell, “Alexander Stamboliiski and the Theory and Practice of Agrarianism in Bulgaria,” in *Bulgaria: Past and Present*, ed. Thomas Butler (Columbus, OH: American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies, 1976), 78–90.

⁶⁰ Richard Crampton, “Modernization: Conscious, Unconscious, and Irrational,” in *Industrialisierung und gesellschaftlicher Wandel in Südosteuropa*, ed. Ronald Schönfeld (Munich: Südosteuropa Gesellschaft, 1989), 125–134, esp. 128–129.

Yugoslavia to alleviate the situation of the Bulgarians in Macedonia (eventually upon Romania on behalf of the Bulgarians in Southern Dobruja). Rapprochement with Yugoslavia was adopted by Stamboliiski as the more promising (and more realistic) option, and the same policy was pursued with some wavering by the next governments as well, especially by the authors of the coup d'état on May 19, 1934, and later on with the pact for "eternal friendship" with Yugoslavia in January 1937—in all cases with little success.⁶¹ However, the foreign policy of Stamboliiski was underpinned by more general and "idealistic" principles, such as appeals to friendship and sincerely good relations with neighboring states, as well the idea of a Balkan or South Slav federation with the participation of Bulgaria and Macedonia. In the Balkan context of national animosities and mutual distrust, this sounded extremely unusual.

In striving to improve Bulgarian-Yugoslav relations, Stamboliiski made some tactless statements during a visit to Belgrade concerning the "Macedonians" in general.⁶² Later on he signed the Niš agreement (March 1923), where he assumed a unilateral obligation to pursue the bands (*cheti*) of the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization on the Bulgarian side of the border. This earned him the deadly hatred of IMRO, which took control of the Pirin district (the Bulgarian part of Macedonia) and started a real war against the Agrarian government. Minister of War Alexandŭr Dimitrov (Stamboliiski's "right hand") was killed, there were attempts on the life of Raiko Daskalov and of Stamboliiski himself, and the government was greatly discredited by its weakness. (The leaders of the coup d'état of May 19, 1934, who pursued the same policies of rapprochement with Yugoslavia at the expense of IMRO first dealt with it very resolutely with the help of the army.)

In the historiography on the policies on the national question, the prevailing opinion holds that, while the rapprochement with Yugoslavia was correct in principle, Stamboliiski went too far with his concessions and his idealistic appeals for humaneness and justice and showed an "unwarranted naïveté" instead of a "cold diplomatic approach." Regarding the Macedonian question, not only were the tactics erroneous, but so was the abrupt turn in traditional foreign policy, grounded in Stamboliiski's idea of a

⁶¹ Krŭstyū Manchev, *Istoriya na balkanskite narodi 1918–1945* (History of the Balkan nations, 1918–1945) (Sofia: Paradigma, 2000), 156–157, 157–227; Georgi Markov, *Bŭlgarskata istoriya vkratse* (Bulgarian history in brief) (Sofia: Izdatelstvo "Svyat," 1992), 249, 252.

⁶² Stefan Gruev, *Korona ot trŭni*, 109.

Balkan or South Slav federation, in which Macedonia would be autonomous (according to Dinyu Sharlanov, with the possible hope of unification); in fact, this was unrealistic and had no prospects of success.⁶³ As one can see, the judgments themselves derive from traditional national policies and goals. Otherwise the authors do not doubt Stamboliiski's sincere and tested patriotism. Only a certain amateur historian went so far as to renew the contemporary accusations of national treason.⁶⁴ It is not hard to see that any reintroduction of the old irredentist Macedonian passions in historiography would reflect negatively on Stamboliiski.

American historian John Bell views positively Stamboliiski's attempt to break with contemporary narrow nationalistic politics and to put regional politics on a new basis of peace and neighborly relations. In any case, remarks Bell, the subsequent return to traditional national goals did not succeed.⁶⁵ Taking into account the considerable influence of the present upon historical scholarship, one wonders whether the new European realities might predispose historians more favorably toward the "idealistic" views of Stamboliiski. Macedonia and Serbia's eventual accession to the European Union will realize, though in a different framework, his federative ideal, and he may then appear retrospectively to be a visionary, far ahead of his time...

Bulgarian foreign policy after Stamboliiski returned to the traditional understanding of national interests. Since it was not possible actively to pursue national goals in isolation among victorious neighbors fearful of "revisionism," the governments had to content themselves with ineffective defenses of the Bulgarian minorities in the neighboring countries. The forcible alteration of the ethnic map in Eastern Thrace and Western (Aegean) Thrace and the development of Macedonian national consciousness in Vardar Macedonia rendered Bulgarian claims increasingly unrealistic. National "unification" was finally realized during World War II, but only with the support of Nazi Germany—and for that reason, it was annulled

⁶³ Dinyu Sharlanov, "Upravenieto na BZNS i natsionalniya vŭpros" (The rule of BANU and the national question), *Istoricheski pregled* 43, no. 2 (1987), 3–18, esp. 13, 17. See in the same vein Vasil Vasilev, *Pravitelstvoto na BZNS, VMRO i bŭlgaro-yugoslavskite otnosheniya* (The government of BANU, IMRO [Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization], and Bulgarian-Yugoslav relations) (Sofia: Izdatelstvo na BAN, 1991), 313–321, esp. 316, 319.

⁶⁴ Petŭr Konstantinov, *Istoriya na Bŭlgariya s nyakoi premŭlchavani dosega istoricheski fakti 681–1996* (History of Bulgaria with some previously unmentioned historical facts, 681–1996) (Sofia: Karina M, 1997), 207.

⁶⁵ John Bell, *Peasants in Power*, 184–207 (foreign policy), esp. 206–207.

after the war. Absorption into the Soviet sphere of influence drastically reduced Bulgarian national sovereignty and froze the pursuit of the traditional national goals, which for a time were declared “Great Bulgarian chauvinism.” As the Bulgarian communist regime evolved towards nationalism, the traditional tensions with Yugoslavia and Greece on the old issues reappeared. Historiography then became the preferred venue and medium for openly voicing the nationalist discontents of a failed unification, while the national(ist) historians became guardians of the ideals of the past, thus continuing to live with it in an ever-changing present.

Aleksandŭr Stamboliiski

The ascendancy of the Bulgarian Agrarian Union is inseparable from the personality of the great Agrarian leader Aleksandŭr Stamboliiski, who deserves special attention. As can be expected, a very “controversial” Agrarian rule is complemented by an equally “controversial” Stamboliiski. There are two extremes—indiscriminate vilifying of Stamboliiski by his enemies and unconditional glorification by his followers and supporters. He is praised as the apostle of the peasant organization, a people’s (or peasant) tribune, and a great orator.⁶⁶ In an attempt to raise him above partisan party controversies (and the class interpretation), he is also hailed as a great statesman and reformer.⁶⁷

One of the good descriptions comes from Nikola D. Petkov (the would-be martyr of the Agrarian Union and of Bulgarian democracy): Stamboliiski possessed a fighting spirit; he was a “strong and powerful personality, who fought bravely with all his forces”; he was full of courage and determination; and he was a true leader of the peasant estate. He showed ambition in forging his own fate and still more in organizing the peasants and elevating their social standing, as well as improving Bulgaria’s international position. He was very hardworking, sincere, frank, and outspoken without

⁶⁶ Stamboliiski’s speeches lasted for hours. About his oratorical art, see Petŭr Dumanov, ed., *Politicheskoto krasnorechie na Stamboliiski* (The political oratory of Stamboliiski) (Sofia, 1933); Ivanka Mavrodieva-Georgieva, *Oratorŭt Aleksandŭr Stamboliiski* (Aleksandŭr Stamboliiski the orator) (Sofia: “Selekt” i BZNS “Nikola Petkov,” 1992). On his essays, see Dimitŭr Dimitrov, *Vozhd na BZNS*, 85–112; Bogomil Vŭlov, *Aleksandŭr Stamboliiski. Zhurnalistŭt i publitsistŭt* (Aleksandŭr Stamboliiski. The journalist and the essayist) (Sofia: Sibia, 2004).

⁶⁷ Dimitrina Petrova, *Aleksandŭr Stamboliiski. Dŭrzhavnikŭt reformator* (Aleksandŭr Stamboliiski. The reformer statesman) (Sofia: Znanie, 1995).

regard to consequences.⁶⁸ The diplomat Petūr Neikov describes Stamboliiski's colorful appearance (nice photos of him have been preserved) and the good impressions he left with foreign politicians.⁶⁹ (One wonders why: maybe it was because of his sincerity and frankness, a rare approach in such milieus.) There are testimonies to Stamboliiski's extraordinary energy and capacity for work and to his busy work schedule.⁷⁰

The most negative and manifestly vicious charges against Stamboliiski (mostly from contemporary pamphleteers) are that he was a megalomaniac, conceited, possessed of a limited mind (certainly an unfair charge), sentimental, and not a good statesman.⁷¹ Another unfriendly account describes him as semi-cultured, corrupted, and a social demagogue with a mania for greatness.⁷² Yet another mentions his mania for greatness, dizziness with power, and passion for triumphant parades.⁷³ A fourth calls him an anarchist with crazy ambitions, who played at the "rule of the people" and was guilty of womanizing and extravagance at state expense.⁷⁴ A fifth refers to him as boastful and vainglorious and mentions his liaisons with women, his "baron's life," misuse of power for personal gain, and favoritism toward friends and associates.⁷⁵

⁶⁸ Nikola D. Petkov, *Aleksandūr Stamboliiski. Lichnost i idei* (Aleksandūr Stamboliiski. Personality and ideas) (Sofia, 1930), 21–25.

⁶⁹ Petūr Neikov, *Zavchera i vchera. Skitsi ot minaloto* (The day before yesterday, and yesterday. Sketches from the past) (Sofia: Būlgarski pisatel, 1959), esp. 200–222.

⁷⁰ Aleksandūr Penchev, *Poznavate li Aleksandūr Stamboliiski? Spomeni i belezhki* (Do you know Aleksandūr Stamboliiski? Memoirs and notes) (Veliko Tŭrnovo: Novo vreme, 1945), esp. 26–27.

⁷¹ Yordan Tabakov, *Aleksandūr Stamboliiski. Harakteristika* (Aleksandūr Stamboliiski. Characteristics) (Sofia, 1930).

⁷² Petūr Peshev, *Istoricheskite sŭbitiya i deyateli* (Historical events and actors) (Sofia, 1929), 760–784.

⁷³ Dimo Kazasov, *V tŭmninite na zagovora* (In the darkness of the conspiracy) (Sofia, 1925), 8. Kazasov was a participant in the coup d'état and a minister after it.

⁷⁴ Slaveiko Vasilev, *9 yuni i sŭbitiyata okolo Tatar-Pazardzhik* (June 9 and the events at Tatar-Pazardzhik) (Plovdiv, 1924). Vasilev was a member of the Military League that organized the coup d'état on June 9, 1923, and took part in capturing Stamboliiski, though not in torturing him to death.

⁷⁵ *Druzhbashkiya rezhim. Dokumenti. Aleksandūr Stamboliiski* (The regime of the druzhbashi [as the Agrarians were contemptuously called]. Documents. Aleksandūr Stamboliiski). (Sofia, 1923), 46. The publication is extremely biased against Stamboliiski. In a similar spirit: N. Mirchev, *Padaneto na Stamboliiski* (The fall of Stamboliiski) (Plovdiv, 1923). Accusations in corruption also by Nikola Kormanov, *Zemedelskiyat sŭyuz. Osnovavane. Demagogiya. Deistvitelnost* (The Agrarian Union. Founding. Demagoguery. Realities) (Sofia, 1923), esp. 37–41.

Leaving aside Stamboliiski's not-exemplary family life (which certainly did not influence his political actions) and the accusations of misuse of state resources, which sound somewhat petty and dubious (other Agrarian leaders can be blamed more justifiably), let us take a closer look at the politically relevant traits.⁷⁶ In fact, some of the opposite assessments of Stamboliiski's personality corroborate each other in an interesting way: the same trait is interpreted either positively or negatively. For example, self-confidence is negatively seen as self-conceit and vainglory; megalomania, when positively seen, becomes a sense of mission and political ambition and is a necessary political quality of a leader. The accusations of demagoguery can be perceived positively (and value-neutrally) as the talent to fascinate, persuade, and inspire the masses; besides, he sincerely believed in what he was saying (and was no deceiver).⁷⁷ On the other hand, his excessive and frank talk (and the invective against professional groups as such) earned him many enemies. He was certainly not a "diplomat" in his improvised speeches, but a tribune of the "people" and a "demagogue" in the classical sense.

Stamboliiski unconsciously characterized himself, or rather, his idea of himself, in a little-cited work entitled "What the Politician Should Be" (though it is more about what a politician should not be). In the foreground are qualities such as readiness to fight, dedication to the cause, and selfless service to the people. Meanwhile, a realistic sense of the possible and the art of compromise are, characteristically, absent. In a revealing passage he says somewhat apologetically that the qualities and merits of the good politician strike the people, so that without possessing the inclinations of a dictator, he begins to exert a strong influence on the people around him—his authority grows and his "peaceful, inoffensive and natural power expands."⁷⁸

⁷⁶ See in this vein also John Bell, *Peasants in Power*, 156–157.

⁷⁷ *Aleksandŭr Stamboliiski* (Sofia, 1922) (unknown author), esp. 29–31, 50; Petŭr Dumanov, ed., *Politicheskoto krasnorechie*, 7–19 (introduction by Petŭr Dumanov).

⁷⁸ Aleksandŭr Stamboliiski, "Kakŭv tryabva da bŭde politikŭt" (What the politician should be), in Angel Dimov, *Politicheski portret na Aleksandŭr Stamboliiski* (Political portrait of Aleksandŭr Stamboliiski) (Plovdiv: Akademichno izdatelstvo na VSI, 1999) (first published 1919), 41–89, esp. 85–89, citation on 87. See also the eulogy of the combative spirit in Stamboliiski's speech on the occasion of the funeral of his friend and cabinet minister Aleksandŭr Dimitrov, murdered by the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization: Aleksandŭr Stamboliiski, "Za zhivota i smŭrta" (On life and death), in Aleksandŭr Stamboliiski, *Izbrani proizvedeniya* (Selected works) (Sofia: Izdatelstvo na BZNS, 1980), 382–285.

Stamboliiski does not look so harmless in the eyes of his older associate and rival Dimitŭr Dragiev (whom he sharply attacked and removed from the leadership of the Agrarian Union in 1919). Dragiev describes him as an atheist, a materialist, and a revolutionary, as well as someone inclined to build a “personal regime” as a new Ferdinand (i.e., the former king).⁷⁹ Reading between the lines, we get an idea about Dragiev himself: a believer (he was an Evangelical Protestant), more moderate, not so ambitious or power-oriented, to which one may also add: too morally exacting and doctrinaire to be a politician.

There is also the unvarnished, even harsh description by Petŭr Dumanov. Stamboliiski was no stranger to demagoguery, because he operated with the soul of the masses, of the crowd, not with their mind; that is why he managed to organize enormous peasant masses in his party. He was an “impetuous fanatic of his movement,” “a formidable politician and ruler” in his struggle against those he considered responsible for the people’s misfortunes. Like Stambolov, he was on the road to becoming a “dictator and a tyrant” and exhibited similar traits especially in power, but also in his organization. He asserted himself and bravely assumed responsibility, sparked unnecessary conflicts, went beyond the frame of legality, waged a war to destroy the old parties, and was eliminated in the same violent way as Stambolov.⁸⁰ On the other hand, one should add to Stamboliiski’s character traits a certain simple-heartedness and naïveté, which is hard to reconcile with typical notions of a dictator. This naïveté manifested itself on a number of occasions and facilitated the coup d’état (because he did not heed the warnings).⁸¹

Of interest—despite all the necessary caveats—is the opinion of Alexandŭr Tsankov, university professor of national economy, one-time socialist and later fascist, prime minister of the government after the coup d’état against the Agrarians, who became notorious for the bloody suppression of the Agrarians and the communists. His characterization of Stamboliiski (in his memoirs, written much later in emigration) reads: “energetic, impulsive, courageous, he was the called-upon leader of a peasant movement

⁷⁹ Dimitŭr Dragiev, *Edna politicheska*, 8–9, 75–76.

⁸⁰ Stamboliiski, *Lichnost, delo, epokha* (Stamboliiski. Personality, deeds, era) (Pleven, 1928), esp. 14–23, 99–101.

⁸¹ Elena Statelova and Stoicho Grŭncharov, *Istoriya na nova*, 391. See in this sense also the testimony of the agrarian activist Kosta Todorov, *Izpovedta na edna luda balkanska glava* (The confessions of a Balkan firebrand) (Sofia, 1994), 190. First published in the United States in 1942 as *Balkan Firebrand: The Autobiography of a Rebel Soldier and Statesman*.

with great latent energy.” According to Tsankov, after the war Stamboliiski came out of the prison a changed person: “embittered, vengeful, extreme, unrestrained, with great pretensions; he had the feeling that he was a martyr and that his martyrdom would crown him with fame and honors.” He already felt like a “called-upon ruler, reformer, and savior of Bulgaria, and that he would clear it of all defects and weeds.” Since that time, flattered and praised by his friends, he developed a mania for greatness and had powerful ambitions (his close associates called him “Ivailo II” [after the peasant leader of a successful medieval peasant uprising, who became king of Bulgaria] and King Boris III referred to him in private as “the Great”).⁸²

In his well-received biography of King Boris III, Stefan Gruev touches upon his attitude to Stamboliiski. According to Gruev, the king was then young and patronized, almost adopted by the unruly Agrarian leader. The king felt admiration toward him but was astonished by the way he antagonized many circles of the society (especially the townspeople and the intelligentsia).⁸³ However, another description seems more plausible and better documented. It runs as follows: the king was placed in a subordinate position and felt his rule was threatened, so he concealed his negative feelings towards the extremes of Agrarian rule, with its unhappy confrontation with the cities and with influential social forces (as the king put it, the government was a “bull in a china shop”). Boris III temporarily put up with wearing “the orange color” (i.e., the color of the Agrarian banner) and did not want to be involved in the coup d’état that he foresaw. When it happened, he was sorry for the brutal murder of Stamboliiski (“the poor great man,” “a martyr”) as well as for the political terror unleashed by Alexandŭr Tsankov and the Military League.⁸⁴

The memoirs of the émigré lawyer Konstantin Katsarov reject a superficial and facile understanding of Stamboliiski and leave something mysterious and extraordinary around him: “The personality of Stamboliiski is an enigma in our public life. He passed through life like a bright meteor. He flamed out and rapidly died away and carried away in the darkness of eternity the whole secret of his talent.”⁸⁵

⁸² Aleksandŭr Tsankov, *Bŭlgaria v burno vreme. Spomeni* (Bulgaria in tempestuous times. Memoirs) (Sofia: Prosorets, 1998), 119–121, 140–142, citations on 119, 120, 121.

⁸³ Stefan Gruev, *Korona ot trŭni*, 107–112.

⁸⁴ Doncho Daskalov, *Tsar Boris III. Poznatiyat i nepoznatiyat* (King Boris III. The familiar and unfamiliar) (Sofia: Agato, 2001), 14–29.

⁸⁵ Konstantin Katsarov, *60 godini zhiviyana*, 324.

However, the point is not just what he was like, but how he was styled (and used) posthumously. The communist characterization of Stamboliiski (once he was dead and his party was neutered) is positive and glorifying, but sounds distant, declarative, and hollow. According to Georgi Dimitrov, he was “a true democrat-republican,” a “brave fighter for people’s rights.”⁸⁶ In the words of the well-known ideologue and philosopher of the Stalinist era Todor Pavlov, he was “a great Bulgarian,” “one of the bright and original figures in our history.”⁸⁷ The historians followed this lead, characterizing Stamboliiski in clichés, such as a “democrat with a fighting spirit,” “humanist,” and “progressive-democratic and combatant-revolutionary type.”⁸⁸ However, Stamboliiski was ambiguously viewed by the authorities until the end of the communist regime, and no official hero cult of him was created. The glorifying publications of some followers remained obscure and “apocryphal.” Characteristically, his works were not collected in a multi-volume edition.

Stamboliiski also inspired works of fiction and documentary fiction.⁸⁹ The best work of this kind is a fictionalized biography by Lyudmil Stoyanov.⁹⁰ This book, in which Stamboliiski’s negative attitude toward the communists and the developments in Bolshevik Russia is not passed over in silence, was subject to crude editorial interference and a “reworking” in the spirit of the “correct” communist views regarding the delusions and errors of the Agrarian Union.⁹¹

⁸⁶ Georgi Dimitrov, “Predupreditelen zov” (Premonitory call), in Georgi Dimitrov, *Sŭchineniya* (Works), vol. 12 (Sofia: Izdatelstvo na BKP, 1954), 206–208, citation on 206 (article in *Rabotnichesko delo*, no. 125, June 8, 1946).

⁸⁷ Todor Pavlov, “Aleksandŭr Stamboliiski,” in Todor Pavlov, *Ideini sŭkrovishta v istoriyata na Bŭlgariya* (Treasures of ideas in the history of Bulgaria) (Sofia: Bŭlgarski pisatel, 1977), 174–181, esp. 174.

⁸⁸ Hristo Hristov, “Aleksandŭr Stamboliiski v novata,” 43, 60; Nedyu Hedev, *Aleksandŭr Stamboliiski i zagovorŭt*, 335–336, 338–341, 343.

⁸⁹ Mikhail Genovski, *Aleksandŭr Stamboliiski. Zhivot, idei, borbi. 1900–1914* (Aleksandŭr Stamboliiski. Life, ideas, struggles. 1900–1914) (Sofia, 1947). This is a fictionalized biography of Stamboliiski. Also Mikhail Genovski, *Aleksandŭr Stamboliiski—otblizo*. The book contains memoirs and reflections. Also Paun Genov, *Zemyata beshte tvoyat zhrebii. Kniga za Stamboliiski* (The land was your fate. A book about Stamboliiski) (Sofia: Izdatelstvo na BZNS, 1989). This is documentary fiction, strongly panegyric.

⁹⁰ Lyudmil Stoyanov, *Stamboliiski. Zemedelskiyat apostol. Romanizuvan zhivot* (Stamboliiski. The Agrarian apostle. Fictionalized life) (Sofia: Zemya i kultura, 1931).

⁹¹ Lyudmil Stoyanov, *Stamboliiski. Romanizuvan zhivot* (Stamboliiski. Fictionalized life), second revised and expanded edition, ed. Stanyo Sirakov (Sofia: Izdatelstvo na OF, 1971). The publishing house defended the intervention with the argument that it had only just then become possible to evaluate correctly the deeds and fate of Stamboliiski.

The Agrarian Union and the “Unity of Action” with the Bulgarian Communist Party

The relations between the Agrarian Union and the Communist Party during the rule of Stamboliiski and afterwards are the subject of special interest in historiography, and many studies are dedicated to them. The pre-conceived ideological-political goal of most of them is to demonstrate a collaboration between the two political forces, known as “unity of action” (*edinodeistvie*). The point is to find precedents and prove the continuity of the “worker-peasant alliance” under communist guidance, which was one of the ideological pillars of the communist regime. Another goal, connected to the first, was to deny the ideological and political independence of the Agrarian Union, which appears as a junior partner.⁹² It is here that the greatest distortions occur, and one comes across sheer fabrications. However, more typical and effective is the selective pointing out of cases of collaboration (and attention mainly toward the leftist Agrarian activists) and the presentation of the various tactical initiatives of the Communist Party as if actually adopted by the Agrarians. And most importantly, the studies, independent of their factual contents, frame events as “unity of action,” even though what predominated was the opposite—“disunity of action” and even “counter-action.”⁹³

Regarding Agrarian-communist relations during Stamboliiski’s rule, even the most biased authors cannot deny that strong tensions existed. They were due both to the position of the Agrarians and the views of the “narrow socialists” about the peasants as peasant bourgeoisie without revolutionary potential, and about their party as a regular bourgeois party. It came to open conflict with the crushing of the socialist-organized political transport strike by the Agrarian government, and relations deteriorated again towards the end of the regime. Still, the authors underline the rare occasions of “joint action” between the two par-

⁹² The manipulation is twofold because a fictitious past (of “unity of action”) concealed the falsehood about a subsequent “alliance” between communists and agrarians.

⁹³ For example, Dimitŭr Tishev, *Edinodeistviето между комунисти и земеделци в борбата срещу фашизма* (The unity of action between communists and agrarians in the struggle against fascism) (Sofia: Izdatelstvo na BZNS, 1976). Pavel Kostov, *Septemvri 1923. V edinen front za rabotnichesko-selska vlast* (September 1923. In a united front for worker-peasant rule) (Sofia: Izdatelstvo na BZNS, 1973). See also Dimitrina Petrova, “Deloto na Aleksandŭr Stamboliiski i progresivnite traditsii na BZNS (The deeds of Aleksandŭr Stamboliiski and the progressive traditions of BANU),” in *Aleksandŭr Stamboliiski. Zhivot, delo, zaveti*, 209–221.

ties: the referendum for putting the bourgeois governments on trial and the help of the communists in revealing the (putative and not quite proven) conspiracy of Baron Wrangel's White Guard officers against the government. Stamboliiski's occasional "generous" pronouncements to the communists are selectively cited (e.g., that they would come to power after the long-lasting rule of the Agrarian Union), disregarding his more typical threats, irony, and condemnation.⁹⁴ There are more realistic accounts of the tense relations between the two forces, but without an understanding (or, at least, an explicit one) of the deep antagonism between the two, which was due not only to fundamental differences in ideas, but also to rivalry for mass support on the left of the political spectrum.⁹⁵

In the same vein of "unity of action," there are outright fabrications (sometimes passed on in good faith), such as the alleged insight of Stamboliiski just before his death that the attitude toward the communists was erroneous, as well as his supposed final wish to renounce the idea of independent peasant (i.e., Agrarian) rule and call for union with the communists. This is based on "evidence" such as a lost letter from Stamboliiski to the secretary of a village communist cell, presumably read and memorized by a messenger of Stamboliiski, as well as later remembrances of "con-

⁹⁴ *Istoriya na Bŭlgariya v tri toma*, vol. 3, 72; Stela Dimitrova, "Otnoshenieto na BKP kŭm BZNS i Aleksandŭr Stamboliiski prez samostoyatelното upravlenie na BZNS" (The attitude of the Bulgarian Communist Party to BANU and Aleksandŭr Stamboliiski during the rule of the Agrarian Union), in *Aleksandŭr Stamboliiski. Zhivot, delo, zaveti*, 224–246.

⁹⁵ Typically the Agrarians are said to have looked for an illusionary "middle" way (neither with the bourgeoisie nor with the proletariat) and to have fought "on two fronts"—against the bourgeoisie and its parties and against the workers and the Communist Party. See Dimitŭr Kosev, *Septemvriiskoto vŭstanie*, 58; Dimitrina Petrova, *Samostoyatelното upravlenie*, 8; Petko Stoichev, "Aleksandŭr Stamboliiski—ideolog," 15–16; Kŭnyu Kozhukharov, *Bŭlgarsliyat zemedelski*, 120. After 1989 Ilcho Dimitrov pointed out that the Agrarian Union and the communists had a lot in common in terms of their social base, and both aspired for influence among the masses while proposing different solutions for the same problems. For that reason there was no durable or real unity of action between them. See Ilcho Dimitrov, *Navremenna sreshta sŭs spomenite na Konstantin Muraviev* (Timely rendezvous with the memoirs of Konstantin Muraviev). In Ilcho Dimitrov, *Ochevidtsi i izsledvachi* (Witnesses and researchers) (Sofia: Universitetsko izdatelstvo "Sv. Kliment Okhridki," 2005), 363–380, esp. 376. About the exaggeration of the leftist tendencies in the Agrarian Union and of the "unity of action" with the communists, also Luiza Revyakina, *Kominternŭt i selskite partii na Balkanite 1923–1931* (The Comintern and the peasant parties in the Balkans, 1923–1931) (Sofia: Akademichno izdatelstvo "Prof. Marin Drinov," 2003), 14–16.

temporaries and eyewitnesses to the events” of the last days of the Agrarian leader (who ascribe to him the communist slogan of “unity of action,” which actually was not coined until later).⁹⁶ While such falsifications are rejected even by otherwise hard-line historians, the very direction of the search and “proof” is telling.⁹⁷

The a priori assumed unity of action between Agrarians and communists leads to characteristic distortions in the presentation of the uprisings of June and September 1923. Yono Mitev (the discoverer of Stamboliiski’s “final testament”) put forward the thesis that the June Uprising (of supporters of Stamboliiski) after the coup d’état of June 9, 1923, “was conducted under the slogan of worker-peasant rule” and that there existed “a political consciousness and a common goal under the banner of a brotherly alliance between workers and peasants, communists, and Agrarians” with the support of the toppled Agrarian leaders. Thus the June Uprising is considered a “dress rehearsal” for the (communist) September Uprising of 1923.⁹⁸

However, this is too much even for a seasoned communist author like Dimitŭr Kosev, who makes special efforts to refute the above thesis and assert the accurate one, namely, that the Agrarians alone launched the June Uprising (even if some rank-and-file communists participated) and that it was spontaneous. In contrast, the Communist Party organized the September Uprising (after the reversal of the party’s neutrality tactics at the Central Committee meeting on August 5–7, 1923), which stood under the banner of worker-peasant rule with the working class in a leading role (and was conducted in alliance with the “united front” leftists in the

⁹⁶ Dimitŭr Tishev, *Edinodestviето между комунисти*, 92–94; Dimitŭr Tishev, “Otnoshenieto na Aleksandŭr Stamboliiski kŭm Bŭlgarskata komunisticheska partiya” (The attitude of Aleksandŭr Stamboliiski to the Bulgarian Communist Party), *Istoricheski pregled* 35, no. 2 (1979): 7–21, esp. 19–21; Dimitŭr Tishev, “Zavetŭt na Aleksandŭr Stamboliiski i edinodestviето na BKP i BZNS v stroitelstvoto na sotsializma” (The legacy of Aleksandŭr Stamboliiski and the unity of action between the BCP and BANU in the building of socialism), in *Aleksandŭr Stamboliiski. Zhivot, delo, zaveti*, 193–208; Yono Mitev, *Fashistkiyat prevrat*, 221–222, 421; Nedŭy Nedev, *Aleksandŭr Stamboliiski i zagovorŭt*, 335.

⁹⁷ Dimitŭr Kosev, “Harakter na Yunsoto i Septemvriiskoto vŭstanie prez 1923 g.” (Character of the June and September uprisings in 1923), *Istoricheski pregled* 43, no. 1 (1987): 18–41, esp. 21. As Kosev points out, such things are improbable, and they could only have happened after the resolutions of the Central Committee of the Bulgarian Communist Party on August 5–7 for building up a united front with the Agrarian Union.

⁹⁸ Yono Mitev, *Fashistkiyat prevrat*, 357, 422.

Agrarian Union).⁹⁹ Dimitŭr Kosev has on his side the authority of Georgi Dimitrov, who denounced the “ill-fated neutrality” of the communists in the Agrarian June Uprising and characterized the September Uprising of 1923 (of which he was an organizer) as a “turning point” in the Bolshevization of the narrow socialists; it also dug out a “deep chasm” between the people and the fascist bourgeoisie. While it is true that the slogan of the communists was for a “united front” (with the Agrarians) and a worker-peasant government, the assertion of Dimitrov (and of historians afterwards) that an agreement was reached for joint struggle with the Agrarian Union is not true. In fact, the Agrarian leadership did not accept the proposal, and only a few leftist Agrarians collaborated (and joint local communist-Agrarian committees were set up in some places to prepare and lead the uprising).¹⁰⁰

After the “united front” in the September Uprising of 1923 and its aftermath, the “unity of action” between communists and Agrarians found expression in other communist initiatives, such as the “labor bloc,” the Popular Front (after 1935), and the Fatherland Front (during World War II). All these are presented as actual alliances—links in an uninterrupted chain of common struggles against the bourgeoisie and fascism up to the victory of socialism. This interpretation was cemented by Georgi Dimitrov at the Fifth Congress of the Bulgarian Communist Party in 1948 (and taken up in the historiography).¹⁰¹

Post-communist historiography, often by the same authors (though not those of the previous militant generation), reveals a rather different picture. To be more precise, even if the “facts” were known before, the focus of attention shifted, rearranging them in a different picture. To begin with, after the overthrow the Agrarian Union was subjected to severe repression and underwent a deep crisis. It disintegrated into several unions (or factions)

⁹⁹ Dimitŭr Kosev, “Harakter na Yunskoto”; Dimitŭr Tishev, *Nachaloto na istoricheskiya prelom* (The beginning of the historical turning point) (Sofia: Izdatelstvo na BZNS, 1981), esp. 181–189, 202–208.

¹⁰⁰ Georgi Dimitrov, “Politicheski otchet,” 238–241. About the refusal on the part of the Agrarian Union after 1989, see Dimitrina Petrova, *Bŭlgarskiyat zemedelski naroden sŭyuz 1899–1944* (The Bulgarian Agrarian National Union, 1899–1944) (Sofia: Fondatsiya “Detelina,” 1999), 127–128.

¹⁰¹ Georgi Dimitrov, “Otechestveniyat front, negovoto razvitiye i predstoyashtite mu zadachi. Doklad pred Vtoriya kongres na Otechestveniya front, 2 fevruari, 1948 g.” (The Fatherland Front, its development, and forthcoming tasks. Report before the Second Congress of the Fatherland Front, February 2, 1948), in Georgi Dimitrov, *Sŭchineniya* (Works), vol. 13 (Sofia: Izdatelstvo na BKP, 1955), 447–508, esp. 461–467; Dimitŭr Tishev, “Otnoshenieto na Aleksandŭr Stamboliiski,” 21.

of left-wing, center, and right-wing orientation, each with their own leaders, who fought for legitimacy among themselves and for influence among the local *druzhbi*. There were also two “leftist” émigré centers in Prague and Belgrade (claiming to be “governments in exile”) in complicated relations between themselves and with the Agrarians in Bulgaria. To complicate things further, the various Agrarian factions were constantly in flux, with further splits (into “wings and feathers”) and changes of fortunes, from growth in influence to decline. In fact, ever since 1923 the splits of the Agrarians and their inability to join forces have become proverbial (and continued after 1989).¹⁰² The “unity of action” proposed by the communists also passed through various “concepts”: wresting the peasants away from the influence of their party (called “union from below”), alliance with leftist Agrarian activists and groups (called “united front”), and also alliance with centrist and right-wing Agrarian factions (and other parties) in a broader “Popular Front” (since 1935) directed against fascism.

In fact, the “unity of action” with the illegal communists found a response only among some leftist Agrarian activists who took the risk of being persecuted by the authorities (or murdered) and disavowed by their own milieu; apart from that there were short-lived “tactical” agreements (of Comintern functionaries) with the Agrarian émigrés. The “labor bloc” (or “bloc of labor democracy”) was an initiative of the leftist Agrarian activist Dimităr Grŭncharov for collaboration with the communists after the September Uprising. The Agrarian Left at that time consisted of Dimităr Grŭncharov, Nikolai Petrini, Petko D. Petkov, and a few surviving associates of Stamboliiski, all of them murdered after the communist bombing of the Sveta Nedelya Church on April 16, 1925—the biggest terrorist act in interwar Europe. After that, collaboration ceased for a long time to come.¹⁰³

¹⁰² Good descriptions of the state of affairs among the Agrarians: Mikhail Genovski, “Nyakoi strani ot vlianieto na Oktomvriiskata sotsialisticheska revolyutsiya vŭrkhu zemedelskoto dvizhenie v Bŭlgariya” (Some aspects of the influence of the October Socialist Revolution on the agrarian movement in Bulgaria), in *40 godini Velika oktomvriiska sotsialisticheska revolyutsiya* (40 Years Great October Socialist Revolution) (Sofia: Nauka i izkustvo, 1957), 197–242, esp. 200–206, 228–238. After 1989: Dimitrina Petrova, *Bŭlgarskiyat zemedelski*, 125–235; Luiza Revyakina, “Kominternŭt i selskoto dvizhenie v Bŭlgariya (1923–1939)” (The Comintern and the peasant movement in Bulgaria, 1923–1939), in *Bŭlgariya i Rusiya prez XX vek. Bŭlgaro-ruski nauchni diskusii* (Bulgaria and Russia in the twentieth century. Bulgarian-Russian scholarly discussions), ed. Vitka Toshkova et al. (Sofia: Gutenberg, 2000), 68–78.

¹⁰³ Mikhail Genovski, “Nyakoi strani,” 228–231. One can also mention the agreement between the Communist Party and the leftist émigrés (represented by Kosta Todorov)

The Popular Front was initiated by Georgi Dimitrov in 1935 at the Seventh Congress of the Comintern, whose resolutions were endorsed by the Sixth Plenum of the Bulgarian Communist Party in February 1936. But the realization of the Popular Front was very weak. Some Agrarian factions participated modestly and without formal agreements, represented by individual activists and by the Agrarian youth organizations mostly locally and “from below.” Collaboration took place in various mass organizations, such as cooperatives, trade unions, reading rooms, sports associations, and the temperance movement. In practice the “struggle against fascism” was rendered meaningless by the Munich Conference in September 1938, when Great Britain and France abandoned Czechoslovakia to Germany, and especially after the Molotov-Ribbentrop (Nazi-Soviet) non-aggression pact; the “struggle against fascism” was renewed only after the German invasion of the Soviet Union and the formation of the anti-Nazi coalition.¹⁰⁴ Finally, the anti-fascist Fatherland Front was set up on the initiative of the Moscow bureau of the Bulgarian Communist Party (headed by Georgi Dimitrov) in the summer of 1942 and was joined by the Agrarian Union “Aleksandŭr Stamboliiski” (unofficially called “Pladne”), led by Nikola Petkov, with some reservations concerning armed resistance (while the most influential Agrarian Union, “Vrabcha 1,” led by Dimitŭr Gichev, refused to take part). Nikola Petkov entered the National Committee of the Fatherland Front in August 1943.¹⁰⁵

On September 9, 1944, the communist-dominated Fatherland Front (which included the Agrarian Union “Pladne”) assumed power as the Soviet army entered Bulgaria. The strongest opposition to the communists on their path to total power came from milieus of the Agrarian Union, contrary to the slogans then and later about a “worker-peasant alliance” and a “united (communist-Agrarian) front.” The entire opposition, including the small “bourgeois” parties, rallied around the Agrarian Union as the only mass party that could compete with the communists. In the struggle the Agrarian leaders resuscitated some ideological postulates from the times of Stam-

for a joint struggle for worker-peasant rule concluded on February 1924 in Moscow, but it did not yield results.

¹⁰⁴ Quite outspoken about the weak and sporadic collaboration is Veselin Hadzhinikolov, “Nyakoi problemi na uchastieto na BZNS v Narodniya front v Bŭlgariya” (Some problems of the participation of BANU in the Popular Front in Bulgaria), in *Sbornik v chest na akademik Hristo Hristov* (Collected volume in honor of academician Hristo Hristov) (Sofia: Izdatelstvo na BAN, 1988), 129–141, esp. 136–141.

¹⁰⁵ Mikhail Genovski, *Pŭtyat na zemedelskoto*, 65; Dimitrina Petrova, *Bŭlgarskiyat zemedelski*, 224–227.

boliiski: the “estatist” theory with the claim of the Agrarian Union to represent the peasants, the idea of “rule of the people” (with the implication of “peasant rule”), and support for cooperativism as opposed to collectivization on the Soviet model, that is, nationalization of the land.¹⁰⁶

On its way to complete political domination, the Bulgarian Communist Party soon moved to suppress the Agrarian Union in opposition, as well as to isolate, divide, and destroy the independent Agrarian leaders from the Agrarian faction within the Fatherland Front. G.M. Dimitrov (known as Gemeto) managed to escape via the American Embassy in Sofia (but his secretary was tortured to death). Nikola Petkov left the Fatherland Front and became the recognized opposition leader, a staunch critic of the communists, and an advocate of democracy. He was singled out for destruction because of his unflinching courage and open challenging of Georgi Dimitrov; he was tried in a show trial and, despite strong protest from the West, was put to death on September 23, 1947, soon after the peace treaty between the Allies and Bulgaria took effect.¹⁰⁷ In the meantime and afterwards, thousands of Agrarian activists were being sent to prisons and labor camps. In the Fatherland Front there remained only the pro-communist faction of the so-called “healthy forces” of Georgi Traikov, who accepted the guidance of the communists and the objective of building socialism (at the Twenty-seventh Congress of the Agrarian Union in December 1947).¹⁰⁸ The political emasculation of the Agrarian Union was accompanied by propagandist falsification of Aleksandŭr Stamboliiski’s views—he was said to have favored the “united front,” welcomed the Bolshevik revolution, and been on his way to accepting socialism.¹⁰⁹ By

¹⁰⁶ From a strongly pro-communist standpoint, Yordan Zarchev, *BZNS i borbata za ukrepvane na narodnodemokratichnata vlast* (BANU and the struggle for the consolidation of the people’s-democratic rule) (Sofia: Izdatelstvo na BZNS, 1977), 43–44, 50–51. Characteristically, Georgi Dimitrov warned that he did not recognize a monopoly of the Agrarian Union over the peasant masses.

¹⁰⁷ On the heroic struggle of Nikola Petkov and his execution, see Georgi Gunev, *Kŭm brega na svobodata ili za Nikola Petkov i negovoto vreme* (Toward the shore of freedom, or about Nikola Petkov and his times) (Sofia: AD “Informatsionno obsluzhvane,” 1992).

¹⁰⁸ The tactics of the communists toward the Agrarian Union show through the entirely communist description by Yordan Zarchev, *BZNS i borbata*. In a similar sense, see Vasil Vankov, “Ideino-politicheskata evolyutsiya na BZNS prez 1947–1948 g.” (The ideological-political evolution of BANU in 1947–1948), *Istoricheski pregled* 16, no. 6 (1960) 51–60; Vasil Yotov, *Ideino-politicheskata evolyutsiya na BZNS* (The ideological-political evolution of BANU) (Sofia: Izdatelstvo na BZNS, 1966).

¹⁰⁹ Georgi Dimitrov himself gave instructions to describe Stamboliiski as a champion of the “united front”: Yordan Zarchev, *BZNS i borbata*, 72.

the same token, there was a crude fabrication of Stamboliiski's contributions to the class struggle—his “combative legacies”—such as strengthening the worker-peasant alliance, the fraternal union between Agrarians and communists (under communist guidance), Bulgarian-Soviet brotherhood, and the building of communism.¹¹⁰ Historians would later reduce these legacies to the somewhat veiled, but not much more realistic, “unity of action” with the Communist Party. For their part former Agrarian ideologues trying to adapt to the new order cautiously reinterpreted the ideas of Stamboliiski (“biomaterialism” and “agrarianism”) to pull them closer to Marxism and Leninism.¹¹¹

It is interesting that the communist regime in Bulgaria preserved the neutralized Agrarian Union as a pseudo-coalition party despite some suggestions, starting at the end of the 1940s, that it be disbanded. Georgi Dimitrov himself strongly opposed pro-communist Agrarian leader Georgi Traikov's offer to transform the Agrarian Union into a socialist peasant party with Marxist-Leninist ideology and eventually merge it with the Communist Party. Dimitrov's considerations were that the Agrarian Union still had a certain influence among the peasants, that it could help with their mobilization for the construction of socialism and against the capitalist elements, in the collectivization and the transfer of peasant labor to the towns (and—implicitly—that in this way the peasant party activists would be under tighter control).¹¹²

The next communist leader, Vŭlko Chervenkov, was negligent and dismissive of the Agrarian Union during his so-called “cult of personality”

¹¹⁰ Georgi Traikov, *30 godini ot ubiistvoto na demokrata-republikanets Aleksandŭr Stamboliiski* (Thirty years from the murder of the democrat-republican Aleksandŭr Stamboliiski) (Sofia: Izdatelstvo na BZNS, 1953), esp. 21–22. See also *Aleksandŭr Stamboliiski—borets za mir i sblizhenie sus SSSR* (Aleksandŭr Stamboliiski—combatant for peace and rapprochement with the Soviet Union) (Sofia: Izdatelstvo na BZNS, 1952), esp. 15–16.

¹¹¹ Mikhail Genovski, *Zemedelskoto dvizhenie i leninizmŭt* (The Agrarian movement and Leninism) (Sofia, 1948), esp. 29–30, 35–36; Kŭnyu Kozhukharov, “Filosofsko-obshtestvenite vŭzgleđi na Al. Stamboliiski” (The philosophical-social views of Al. Stamboliiski). Introduction to Aleksandŭr Stamboliiski, *Pŭlno sŭbranie na sŭchineni-yata mu* (Full collection of his works [actually never completed—R.D.]), vol. 3 (Sofia: Fondatsiya “Al. Stamboliiski,” 1947), 10–70, esp. 61–70; Nikola Agŭnski, “Vliyanieto na marksizma za oformyane ideite na zemedelskoto dvizhenie” (The influence of Marxism on the formation of the ideas of the agrarian movement), *Zemedelska misŭl*, no. 6–7 (1948), 250–254.

¹¹² Georgi Dimitrov, *Dnevnik (9 mart 1933–6 fevruari 1949)* (Diary, March 9, 1933–February 6, 1949) (Sofia: Universitetsko izdatelstvo “Sv. Kliment Okhridski,” 1997), 634–635. See Yordan Zarchev, *BZNS i borbata*, 211, 230–231, 280–281.

and reduced it to a nonentity as he precisely replicated the Stalinist model. But Todor Zhivkov chose to confirm the thesis of the “communist-Agrarian union” and reassert the role of the Agrarian Union shortly after he came to power at the April 1956 plenum, namely at the September 1956 plenum, where he criticized Chervenkov for his dismissive attitude. Later he appointed Georgi Traikov chairman (premier) of the Council of Ministers; his successor, Petūr Tanchev, was made deputy chairman of the Council of Ministers, and several ministries (of agriculture, of the forests, and of justice) chosen for their sphere of activity and lack of power were always reserved for higher Agrarian functionaries. The Agrarian Union also had a large parliamentary group and positions reserved in the local government (in the People’s Councils) and was encouraged to develop international activities.¹¹³ The position of an “ally” and a “co-ruling” party did not, of course, mean real power or even autonomy inside the party. But it provided considerable privileges and benefits to the “permanent presence” (as the supreme organ of the Agrarian Party was traditionally called) of Agrarian leaders in the higher echelons of the nomenklatura and to the numerous lower Agrarian nomenklatura “cadres.” The “worker-peasant alliance” and the “unity of action” between the Communist Party and the Agrarian Union finally turned into a marriage between segments of the nomenklatura, though the “dictatorship of the proletariat” and the “leading role of the Communist Party” left no doubt as to who was in charge.

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¹¹³ On Todor Zhivkov’s positive attitude towards BZNS, see Niko Yakhiel, *Todor Zhivkov i lichnata vlast. Spomeni. Dokumenti. Analizi* (Todor Zhivkov and the one-person rule. Memoirs. Documents. Analyses) (Sofia: M-8-M, 1997), 86–87.

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CHAPTER 3

The Debate on Fascism and the Anti-fascist Struggles

Among the debated issues in Bulgarian historical scholarship, a central place is occupied by fascism and, closely connected with it, the anti-fascist struggles. In what follows I will trace the evolution of the debate: its initial formulation and further elaboration, changes in the rhetoric, and revisions and reappraisals—and along with it, the evolution of views on the political system in Bulgaria between the wars and during World War II.¹

A brief review of the chronology of the governments in Bulgaria will help in understanding the debates. Bulgaria was on the side of the losers in World War I, and in 1919 popular discontent brought to power the Bulgarian National Agrarian Union of Aleksandŭr Stamboliiski—an authentic peasant party with a radical program. It was overturned on June 9, 1923, by a military coup d'état of the secret Military League (conspiring with a political organization), and a government of the Democratic Concord (*Demokraticheski sgovor*) headed by Aleksandŭr Tsankov was formed under the dominance of the military (June 1923–January 1926). It severely suppressed two uprisings: one of Stamboliiski's supporters in June

¹ See the otherwise quite different historiographical works by Nikolai Poppetrov, “Vŭzmozhnosta za dialog ili ‘diskusiite’ za bŭlgarskiya fashizŭm” (The possibility for dialogue or the “discussions” about Bulgarian fascism), *Demokraticheski pregled*, no. 3–4 (1996): 382–388; Nikolai Poppetrov, “Die bulgarische Geschichtswissenschaft über die Probleme des bulgarischen Faschismus,” *Bulgarian Historical Review*, no. 3 (1986): 82–90; Nikolai Poppetrov, “Faschismus in Bulgarien. Geschichte und Geschichtsschreibung,” *Südost-Forschungen* 41 (1982): 199–218; Nikolai Poppetrov, “Bolgarskii fashizm v balkanskom i evropeiskom kontekste. Kratkoe istoriograficheskoe obozrenie i opyt postroeniya modeli” (Bulgarian fascism in Balkan and European context. A short historiographical review and an attempt at constructing a model), *Bulgarian Historical Review* 21, no. 1 (1993): 146–174.

1923 and a communist uprising in September 1923. Tsankov's government was discredited by the bloodshed and replaced by a second government of the Democratic Concord with Andrei Lyapchev as premier (January 1926–June 1931). The Lyapchev government put an end to the repressions, legalized the Communist Party, and brought peace to the country. The elections of 1931 were won by a coalition of centrist parties called the "People's Bloc," which formed a government. It was toppled by a military coup d'état on May 19, 1934, organized by the (reformed) secret Military League and the political circle Zveno ("Link"). The new government of the "Nineteenthers" (*Devetnaisetomaitsi*) dissolved the National Assembly, banned political parties, and proceeded to build up an authoritarian order, inspired partly by Italian fascism. It was maneuvered out of power via a few short-lived transitory cabinets by King Boris III, who then established a (veiled) royal dictatorship and ruled through non-party cabinets appointed by him. Bulgaria joined the Axis under German pressure on March 1, 1941 (during the premiership of Bogdan Filov), but did not send soldiers to the Eastern Front and managed to rescue its Jews. King Boris III died on August 28, 1943, and a regency was formed. The attempts of Premier Ivan Bagryanov (June 1, 1944–September 2, 1944) to make an about-face and negotiate an exit from the war were unsuccessful. On September 2, with the Red Army already on Bulgaria's northern border, a government was formed under Konstantin Muraviev of the Anglophile opposition. But the Soviet Union declared war, the Red Army marched into Bulgaria, and power passed to the communist-dominated Fatherland Front on September 9, 1944.

The Long Fascism and the Breaches in It

Fascism attracted international attention after Mussolini's March on Rome. The Comintern began to talk about fascism as early as 1922, and due to it and other leftist forces, the term was generalized with the purpose of promoting anti-fascism and rallying the communists on that basis. According to official communist theory, fascism is an agent of capitalism and especially of big business, financial capital, or "state monopoly capitalism." This theory was formulated in 1923, before Italian fascism was fully developed, and it became the official interpretation of the Third International in 1924, codified in 1935 in the well-known formula (of Georgi Dimitrov) that fascism is "an open terrorist dictatorship of the most reactionary, most chauvinist, and most imperialist elements of finan-

cial capital.”² Fascism was thus inflated into a kind of “pan-fascism,” in which all forces connected with capitalism could be said to stand at the service of fascism “objectively” or “in practice”: right-wing authoritarian parties and regimes, and even social democrats who collaborated with them (called “social-fascists” since 1924). This changed after 1935, when the Soviet leadership took the dangers of real fascism more seriously and worked out strategies for fighting it.³

The first people to speak about fascism in Bulgaria were the communists after the coup d'état of June 9, 1923, which they defined differently, but under the influence of the Comintern, as “fascist.” This was mediated by the Bulgarians Vasil Kolarov and Georgi Dimitrov in their capacity as international communist leaders.⁴ Following the lead of the international communist movement, the Bulgarian Communist Party declared its rivals in the left-wing sector to be fascists: “social-fascists” and (in Bulgaria) even agrar(ian)-fascists. Aided by its international figures, the Bulgarian Communist Party regularly appraised the country's governments and political forces, closely following the Comintern definitions and instructions for action. As will be seen, Georgi Dimitrov's characterization of the government of the People's Bloc (1931–1934) as a “breach” in the fascist dictatorship was of particular importance. From the contemporary struggles of the Bulgarian Communist Party, with its changing tactics and propaganda slogans, the notions about fascism and the characterization of the governments entered historical scholarship, where they were initially received literally and uncritically.

The accounts of the early dogmatic historians share several features: the Comintern definition of fascism, taking for granted the existence of a fascist regime in Bulgaria, little empirical analysis, reference to party authorities as argument, and complete identification with the standpoint of

² Georgi Dimitrov, *Sŭchineniya* (Works), vol. 10 (Sofia: Partizdat, 1954), 29. Dimitrov actually paraphrased Stalin.

³ Stanley Payne, *A History of Fascism, 1914–1945* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1995), 441, 443–444.

⁴ See Doncho Daskalov, *Vasil Kolarov i Georgi Dimitrov i revolyutsionnite sŭbitiya v Bŭlgariya 1923–1925* (Vasil Kolarov and Georgi Dimitrov and the revolutionary events in Bulgaria, 1923–1925) (Sofia: Partizdat, 1978), 56. Immediately after the coup d'état on June 9, the Communist Party documents used various definitions for it, such as “White Guardist,” “reactionary,” and “military,” but also “fascist.” During the discussions of the Bulgarian events at the Third Plenum of the Executive Committee of the Communist International, the coup d'état was defined as “reactionary fascist” as early as June 12–13.

the Communist Party (from the past and the present) in general. They also claimed that fascism in Bulgaria was continuously in power from 1923 to 1944—what could be called the “long fascism.” The Stalinist academic *History of Bulgaria* (1955) summarizes the hard-liners’ views on fascism in Bulgaria. The coup d’état on June 9, 1923, is defined as military-fascist, and the subsequent September Uprising of 1923 as anti-fascist (with reference to Georgi Dimitrov). During the government of Andrei Lyapchev, fascism and “the most greedy and most reactionary part of the Bulgarian big monopolistic financial capital” remained in power. The government of the People’s Bloc was a “serious breach in the system of the fascist dictatorship,” because it brought down the fascist Democratic Concord and because it included both fascist and non-fascist forces. The coup d’état on May 19, 1934, initiated the stage of the “open fascist dictatorship”; after the transitory government of Andrei Toshev, it passed into monarcho-fascism (i.e., royal fascism) with the government of Georgi Kyoseivanov. The country was deliberately turned into an “agrarian annex” of the German economy and “bound to the chariot of Hitlerite Germany.”⁵ The authors of this militant communist generation turned to various aspects of fascism and the struggles against it.

Thus the whole period from June 9, 1923, to September 9, 1944, looks like an uninterrupted fascist dictatorship, amid continuous anti-fascist struggles of the Communist Party. It is only logical to think that there would be no room for debate. But in spite of what was taken for granted and ideological dogmatism, differences appeared, and some of the authors were good polemicists. The very pronouncements of the communist leaders that were made in different circumstances and for various purposes gave these authors an opening to reinforce one’s own (only slightly different) view, such as a reference to Georgi Dimitrov (implicitly) against Vŭlko Chervenkov or Todor Zhivkov, or a preference for one particular pronouncement of Dimitrov versus another, quite different one. The Communist Party line itself had swerved, for example, as it denounced “left sectarianism,” which had classified the Agrarians and social democrats as fascists. The ambiguity, or just the inevitable semantic vagueness, of the pronouncements themselves was used to emphasize certain points at the expense of others (of course, within narrow limits).

⁵ *Istoriya na Bŭlgariya v dva toma* (History of Bulgaria in two volumes), vol. 2 (Sofia: Nauka i izkustvo, 1955), 457, 496–497 (author D. Kosev), 563, 612–613 (Zhak Natan), 662, 678, 692–695 (Veselin Hadzhinikolov). The chapter on World War II is by Panayot Topalov and Nikifor Gornenski.

A number of officially sanctioned discussions on the issues of fascism (and the anti-fascist struggles) took place under the auspices of one historical institution or another, probably with the idea of observing the field and obtaining consensus. The first official discussion was organized in 1967–1968, and the papers were published in the major historical journal *Istoričeski pregled* (Historical Review). Georgi Dimitrov's pronouncements about a "breach" in the fascist dictatorship during the government of the People's Bloc (1931–1934) and about national specifics of fascism served as a point of departure.⁶ The "breach" was used at this stage by some authors to attack the hard-liner concept of fascist continuity, while others characteristically tried to minimize the breach and even close it. According to the latter, it was "temporary" and "transient," and the democratization was "seeming"—the fascist dictatorship was neither overturned nor interrupted.⁷ Others went further in completely closing the breach by affirming that there was no change in comparison with the preceding fascist governments.⁸ Yet even some hard-liner historians qualified the breach as "serious" and the government of the People's Bloc as non-fascist (though with "fascist remnants" and "some fascist methods of rule").⁹

The hard-liners' view of fascism can be called metaphysical in the literary sense of being above empiricism. Fascism is omnipresent and all-pervading; it only assumes different faces, and if it does not manifest itself openly (as an "open fascist dictatorship"), it certainly stays "behind the

⁶ On the national specifics of fascism in general (not the Bulgarian case), see Georgi Dimitrov, *Süchineniya* (Works), vol. 10, 30.

⁷ Fani Milkova, *Bülgarskata burzhovazna düzhava prez perioda na fashistkata dikatura, 1923–1944* (The Bulgarian bourgeois state during the period of the fascist dictatorship, 1923–1944) (Sofia: Voenno izdatelstvo, 1987), 70, 72, 73. Other adherents of the thesis of uninterrupted fascist dictatorship were Pavel Kostov, "Ustanovyavane i harakter na fashistkata dikatura v Bülgariya" (Establishment and character of the fascist dictatorship in Bulgaria), *Istoričeski pregled* 23, no. 2 (1967): 97–102; and Veselin Hadzhinikolov, "Oshte za fashizma i negovite osobenosti v Bülgariya" (More on fascism and its peculiarities in Bulgaria), *Istoričeski pregled* 24, no. 6 (1968): 50–63, esp. 57. Hadzhinikolov is inclined to recognize the last (one-week) government of Muraviev as non-fascist, but with the stipulation that the non-fascist parties were admitted to power in order to broaden the social basis of fascism and to rescue the bourgeois establishment from the revolution.

⁸ Yaroslav Yotsov, "Po niakoi vüprosi na bülgarskiya fashizüm" (On some issues of Bulgarian fascism), *Istoričeski pregled* 23, no. 1 (1967): 82–97, esp. 95–96.

⁹ Zhak Natan, "Harakter, süshnost i glavni etapi v razvitiето na bülgarskiya fashizüm" (Character, essence, and main stages in the development of Bulgarian fascism), *Istoričeski pregled* 22, no. 6 (1966), 84–96, citation on 91.

curtains” and “pulls the strings” while parliament functions as a mere façade.¹⁰ The extreme adherents to the long-fascism thesis (with or without interruption) rarely reflect on the implicitly applied definition of fascism, but it is easily seen that the main (and even only) feature is repressiveness, particularly against the Communist Party.¹¹ Only later did many authors react against the arbitrariness of such a definition that allows the classification of military and even bourgeois-parliamentary governments as fascist.

The question about the “peculiarities” of Bulgarian fascism was the other point partly open to debate with the legitimating reference to Georgi Dimitrov. In the discussion of 1968 and afterwards, the authors pointed out various specifics of the Bulgarian case, such as the lack of a mass fascist party (hence the leaning on nationalist and pro-fascist organizations), the close alliance with the monarch (hence “monarcho-fascism”), the absence of a consistent ideology and elaborate political system, and the preservation of certain elements of bourgeois democracy (such as parliamentarism and personal rights).¹² Precisely these alleged “peculiarities” of Bulgarian fascism would later on become the reasons for denying that fascism attained power and ruled in Bulgaria.

The thesis of a breach in the long fascist dictatorship was strengthened and used by a number of authors as a bridgehead for new breaches, that is, for further punctuations of the initial fascist continuity and the rescuing of new governments from the stigmatizing label of fascism.¹³ Almost every combination and sequence of fascist and non-fascist (or less fascist) gov-

¹⁰ Fani Milkova, *Bŭlgarskata burzhoazna*, 17; Veselin Hadzhinikolov, “Oshte za fashizma,” 56.

¹¹ For example, according to Yono Mitev, fascism is an “anti-worker, anti-communist, anti-revolutionary movement.” See Yono Mitev, *Fashistkiyat prevrat na Deveti yuni i Yunskoto antifashistko vŭstanie* (The fascist coup d’état on June 9 and the June anti-fascist uprising) (Sofia: Izdatelstvo na BZNS, 1978, second revised edition; first published 1956), 88; Veselin Hadzhinikolov, “Oshte za fashizma,” 52. The same idea even much later: Nedyu Nedev, “Prekŭsnatost ili neprekŭsnatost na fashistkata diktatura v Bŭlgariya (1923–1944)” (Interruptedness or uninterruptedness of the fascist dictatorship in Bulgaria 1923–1944), *Istoricheski pregled* 45, no. 8 (1989), 76–83, esp. 77, 78.

¹² Veselin Hadzhinikolov, “Oshte za fashizma,” 55–56; Ilcho Dimitrov, “Nyakoi svoebraziya v razvitiето na fashizma v Bŭlgariya” (Some peculiarities in the development of fascism in Bulgaria), *Istoricheski pregled* 24, no. 1 (1968): 95–97, esp. 97.

¹³ A confirmation of this idea in the memoirs of Ilcho Dimitrov, *Vsichko teche. Spomeni* (Everything flows. Memoirs) (Sofia: Tiliya, 2000), 85, 119. As young historian, Dimitrov (and some others) tried to exempt individual governments from being classified as part of the fascist dictatorship, though without contesting it in principle.

ernments has an adherent among the authors. Below are some variations outlined in the discussion of 1967–1968 and in subsequent discussions.

The next government whose fascist character was cast into doubt (after the People's Bloc) was the last bourgeois cabinet—of the Agrarian leader Konstantin Muraviev, who was in office for only a week, from September 2 to 9, 1944. In an article from 1964 (before the discussion), the promising young historian Ilcho Dimitrov (who was to become a respected authority) contested its being labeled monarcho-fascist (or disguised monarcho-fascist) and defined it as a rule of the “right-wing non-fascist bourgeois parties” under the banner of bourgeois democracy. It was the “deepest reserve of the Bulgarian bourgeoisie for rescuing the capitalist formation [*stroï*]” and the “last shield of the bourgeoisie against the socialist revolution.”¹⁴ What was at stake in August 1944 was already not fascism, but the monarchy and capitalism as such. Hence, and logically so, the revolutionary struggle against fascism on the eve of the uprising of September 9, 1944, became a struggle against bourgeois democracy and a “course toward a socialist revolution.” The uprising itself not only eliminated the remnants of the fascist dictatorship in the country, but cut short the attempt to restore the old constitutional regime. Thus the end of the old regime is logically linked with the character of the uprising of September 9, 1944, as the “beginning of a socialist revolution” (and of the “dictatorship of the proletariat”) in keeping with the newly imposed tenet about the postwar era. This author's work is an example of clever use of the new official postulates to achieve a certain revision of the last pre-communist government. Nevertheless Ilcho Dimitrov's theses provoked anger and attacks from the old guard in the official discussion “On the Bourgeois Opposition and the Character of Muraviev's Government,” organized by

¹⁴ Ilcho Dimitrov, “Poslednoto pravitelstvo na burzhoazna Bŭlgariya” (The last government of bourgeois Bulgaria), *Istoricheski pregled* 20, no. 5 (1964): 3–33, citation on 31. See also Ilcho Dimitrov, “Nyakoi svoeobraziya,” 96; Ilcho Dimitrov, *Burzhoaznata opozitsiya v Bŭlgariya 1939–1944* (The bourgeois opposition in Bulgaria, 1939–1944) (Sofia: Nauka i izkustvo, 1969), 167–235. In fact, this idea was expressed earlier, though only in a cursory fashion, in Nikifor Gornenski, *Vŭorŭzhenata borba na bŭlgarskiya narod za osvobodzhenie ot hitleristkata okupatsiya i monarkho-fashistkata diktatura 1941–1944 g.* (The armed struggle of the Bulgarian people for liberation from the Hitlerite occupation and the monarcho-fascist dictatorship, 1941–1944) (Sofia: Izdatelstvo na BKP, 1958), 315. According to Gornenski, Muraviev's government, though “a last bastion of the ruling monarcho-fascist bourgeoisie,” did not belong to it, but was from the legal bourgeois opposition; for that reason its toppling on September 9, 1944, meant more than the destruction of the fascist dictatorship—it was a move toward overturning the rule of the bourgeoisie as such.

the Institute of History of the Bulgarian Communist Party (in October 1972).¹⁵

During the discussion of 1967–1968, the fascist character of the second government of the Democratic Concord under Andrei Lyapchev (1926–1931) was challenged by another young scholar, Nikolai Genchev (who eventually earned a reputation as a courageous freethinker and even became the regime's *bête noire*). He argued that there was a reverse process of “defascization” of political life that began with Lyapchev and was then continued and deepened by the People's Bloc.¹⁶ Genchev's article is uniquely daring and outspoken and contains a sharp and direct attack on the use of “propaganda” and “newspaper” materials from the Communist Party and the Comintern as sources for scholarly research, as well as a direct rejection of the “classical” formulation of fascism by Georgi Dimitrov as not only “incomplete, incorrect, and schematic,” but also “based on current politics, propaganda, and hardly a scientific definition.”¹⁷ Thus the debate on fascism (as pointed out by Ivan Elenkov) was of major importance for the assertion of the concept of historical “scientificity” in Bulgaria, and for the legitimation of historical knowledge as professional and expert knowledge, separate from ideology and politics.¹⁸ It is another question how far this autonomy of the historical scholarship could reach.

In a late and already very perforated version of the fascist continuum, the period 1936–1940 (from the third cabinet of Georgi Kyoseivanov to the cabinet of Bogdan Filov) also dropped out. Thus fascism was in power in 1923–1925 (Aleksandŭr Tsankov), in 1934–1936 (i.e., after the coup d'état of May 19), and in 1940–1944 (the cabinets of Bogdan Filov, Dobri Bozhilov, and Ivan Bagryanov), with punctuations in 1926–1935 (Andrei

¹⁵ “Za burzhoaznata opozitsiya i haraktera na pravitelstvoto na Muraviev” (On the bourgeois opposition and the character of Muraviev's government), *Izvestiya na instituta po istoriya na BKP*, vol. 30, 1974: 165–354. See about this in Ilcho Dimitrov's introduction to the new edition of his book (under a shorter title and with some revisions): Ilcho Dimitrov, *Burzhoaznata opozitsiya 1939–1944* (The bourgeois opposition, 1939–1944) (Sofia: Hristo Botev, 1997), 6–12. The discussion is reprinted at the end of the book.

¹⁶ Nikolai Genchev, “Nuzhni sa seriozni izsledvaniya na fashizma u nas” (Serious research of fascism in Bulgaria is needed), *Istoricheski pregled* 24, no. 4 (1968), 88–91, esp. 90–91. Lyapchev's government is implicitly excluded from being labeled as fascist.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 88.

¹⁸ Ivan Elenkov, “Debatŭt za fashizma sred istoritsite v Bŭlgariya prez XX vek” (The debate on fascism among the historians in Bulgaria in the twentieth century). In *Izledvaniya v chest na prof. Ivailo Znepolski* (Researches in honor of Prof. Ivailo Znepolski) (Sofia: Universitetsko izdatelstvo “Sv. Kliment Okhridski,” 2002), 360–383, esp. 368–373.

Lyapchev and the People's Bloc), 1936–1940 (Georgi Kyoseivanov), and September 2–9, 1944 (Konstantin Muraviev).¹⁹

The vocabulary itself implies different notions of fascism. Thus the metaphor of a “breach” in the fascist dictatorship evokes the idea of a long-lasting and monolithic fascist rule. The later metaphors of fascist “waves” and “tides” (followed by ebbs) convey a quite different idea of fascism as engaged in fighting with bourgeois democracy and leftist forces (communists and Agrarians). The political development is dynamized here and looks not like something predetermined, but like an outcome of conflicting forces with various chances of success. As one author put it: “... one should get rid of the idea that the development of fascism from 1935 onwards followed the line of progression and consolidation, and that the formation of a fascist dictatorship was constantly advancing. The data shows that the formation of the monarcho-fascist regime in Bulgaria presented a very contradictory and complex process of zigzagging, of advance and retreat, of strengthening and weakening of the fascist power...”²⁰

The next government whose fascism came to be placed in doubt, though quite inconclusively because of the brutal persecutions against the communists and the Agrarians, was Aleksandŭr Tsankov's government (1923–1925). This revision was mainly carried out by Vladimir Migeŭ, one of the few open-minded historians of the era. First in the debate of 1967–1968, and then in a major work, he “omitted” any mention of fascism in power until the coup d'état of May 19, 1934.²¹ In a critical review

¹⁹ Nedyu Nedev, “Pekŭstatost ili neprekŭsnatost,” 76–83. But even at this late date Nedev defined Tsankov's government as fascist.

²⁰ Vladimir Migeŭ, “Za periodite na fashistkata diktatura ot 1934 do 1944 g.” (On the periods of the fascist dictatorship from 1934 until 1944), *Istoricheski pregled* 23, no. 2 (1967): 98–100, esp. 98. About “waves” of fascism also Nedyu Nedev, “Pekŭsnatost ili neprekŭsnatost,” 76–83.

²¹ Vladimir Migeŭ, “Za periodite na fashistkata,” 98–100. Migeŭ begins with the statement that the fascist dictatorship in Bulgaria was formed in 1934–1935, when it became monarcho-fascist. Also Vladimir Migeŭ, *Utvŭrzhdavane na monarkho-fashistkata diktatura v Bŭlgariya, 1934–1936 g.* (The consolidation of the monarcho-fascist dictatorship in Bulgaria, 1934–1936) (Sofia: Izdatelstvo na BAN, 1977). Concerning the regime of the Democratic Concord (1923–1931), Migeŭ speaks ambiguously about “the obvious unripeness of the fascism in power in this period” and the “prevalence of the common dictatorial over the specifically fascist features” (22). In the discussion in 1967, Dimo Kazasov also denied that the governments of Tsankov and Lyapchev were fascist and pointed out, for instance, that the parties and the National Assembly were preserved, and there was freedom of the press and of political assembly. Dimo Kazasov, “Fashizmŭt i bŭlgarskite partii” (Fascism and the Bulgarian parties), *Istoricheski pregled* 24, no. 5

of a book by the Russian historian Rita Grishina, who claimed Tsankov's government was fascist, Migevev put this assessment into question.²² He then elaborated his view in 1979 by differentiating between a well-developed and mature fascist regime, on the one hand, and a regime "in a process of fascization," which he said was still a bourgeois dictatorship with a gradual assertion of certain fascist components, on the other hand. The regime of June 19, 1923, he asserted, was "fascist-oriented" with the (unsuccessful) attempt to amalgamate the bourgeois parties into a single ruling party and the adoption of the extraordinary Law for Protection of the State. But in his view these elements were not sufficient to characterize it as "manifestly fascist" (an expression of caution); instead it was basically a military-bureaucratic dictatorship with a strengthened executive, a restricted role for the National Assembly (*sŭbranie*), and a strong position of the "irresponsible factors" (such as the so-called "Convent" of the military, and terrorist elements). With the second cabinet of the Democratic Concord (of Lyapchev), the process of fascization was "frozen."²³ After the fall of communism, Migevev expressed his view more categorically.²⁴

In her subsequent publications Grishina insisted on her thesis about the early advent of fascism to power in Bulgaria, but used an increasingly cautious and casuistic terminology. She defined Tsankov's regime as "semi-fascist" and "pro-fascist" and mostly as "military-fascist," in which she took special care to emphasize the first part of the hyphenated phrase.²⁵ Her later formulations admit the "relative and partial manifesta-

(1968): 94–100, esp. 97. But Kazasov lacked credibility because he was a cabinet minister in Tsankov's government before siding with the communists.

²² Rita Grishina, *Vozniknovenie fashizma v Bolgarii 1919–1925 gg.* (The emergence of fascism in Bulgaria, 1919–1925) (Moscow, 1976); Vladimir Migevev, "Retsenziya na R.P. Grishina. Vozniknovenie fashizma v Bolgarii 1919–1925" (Review of R.P. Grishina. The emergence of fascism in Bulgaria, 1919–1925), *Istoricheski pregled* 34, no. 1 (1978), 103–108, esp. 107.

²³ Vladimir Migevev, "Myastoto na bŭlgarskiya fashizŭm v sistemata na evropeiskiya fashizŭm" (The place of Bulgarian fascism in the system of European fascism), in *Bŭlgariya v sveta ot drevnostta do nashi dni* (Bulgaria in the world from antiquity to the present), vol. 2 (Sofia: Nauka i izkustvo, 1979): 101–110, esp. 101–103. But later in the article, Migevev claims, inconsistently, that on June 9 a "fascist (more precisely, fascizing) dictatorship was established" (106).

²⁴ Vladimir Migevev, "Politicheskata sistema na Bŭlgariya ot 9 yuni 1923 g. do 9 septemvri 1944 g." (The political system of Bulgaria from June 9, 1923, to September 9, 1944), *Istoricheski pregled* 46, no. 9 (1990): 77–89, esp. 82–84.

²⁵ Rita Grishina, "Rolyata na mezhdunarodniya faktor v sistemata na voenno-fashistkiya rezhim prez 1923–1925 g. v Bŭlgariya" (The role of the international factor in the system

tion of the fascist features of the regime” and concede that this “first attack” of fascism in Bulgaria was limited in its results while the “second wave” of the mid-1930s (monarcho-fascism) was more mature, but even it was evolving slowly and was relatively moderate in comparison with the Nazi variant.²⁶ She makes painful attempts to assert unconvincing theses that become all the more unconvincing when she starts enumerating the fascist features that were either absent in Bulgaria or only weakly displayed or not specific to fascism.

In her last work on the topic (published in 1986), Grishina’s understanding changed; she found that the interwar regimes in Bulgaria “did not possess the complete set of features characteristic of fascist dictatorships, and the available features were not expressed clearly enough as in Italy or in Germany.” Grishina attributes this to the country’s economic backwardness, based on the idea that fascism requires a transition to state monopoly capitalism (and alliance with it). It should be noted here that the postulated establishment of fascism is now in need of explanation, namely that the political superstructure of fascism was built upon an insufficiently modernized economic base; hence the relatively rapid fall of the regime, which was not in accord with its economic base and was not supported by the whole bourgeoisie.²⁷ An unconvincing thesis is buttressed by ad hoc explanations.

The treatment of the regime that took power on May 19, 1934, is especially interesting because of the efforts to somehow “excuse” it, if not separate it from fascism altogether, especially by the communist hardliners. The explanation has little to do with scholarship, but much to do with political expedience—the subsequent evolution of the most important protagonists of the coup d’état (including Kimon Georgiev, Damyan Vel-

of the military-fascist regime in 1923–1925 in Bulgaria). In *Bŭlgariya v sveta*, vol. 2, 89–94, citations on 89, 93.

²⁶ Rita Grishina, “K voprosu o bolgarskoi raznovidnosti fashizma” (On the question of the Bulgarian variety of fascism). In *Fashizm i antidemokraticheskie rezhimy v Evrope* (Fascism and the anti-democratic regimes in Europe) (Moscow, 1981), 101–119, esp. 105–110. Grishina characterizes the regime of May 19 as fascist in essence and its further development as “monarcho-fascism” with the monarch in the role of a Bulgarian Führer (but in a moderate version in comparison with the Nazi regime).

²⁷ Rita Grishina, “Osobenosti sotsial’no-ekonomicheskoi struktury i politicheskogo razvitiya mezhdvoennoi Bolgarii” (Peculiarities of the socioeconomic structure and of the political development of interwar Bulgaria). In *Sotsial’naya struktura i politicheskie dvizheniya v stranakh Tsentral’noi i Yugovostochnoi Evropy. Mezhdvoenny period* (Social structure and political movements in the states of Central and Southeastern Europe. Interwar period) (Moscow: Nauka, 1986), 16–29, citation on 16–17.

chev, Petŭr Popzlatev, and Georgi Kulishev) towards the communists and their participation in the Fatherland Front during the war and then in the first governments after September 9, 1944. In fact, the policies of the "Nineteenters" are bound to be sympathetic to the communists on many counts: the restoration of relations with the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia, the republicanism (anti-monarchism) of some of the officers, the banning and defeat of the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization (headed by Ivan Mikhailov, who emigrated), and even the establishment of some state monopolies. Given this, such totalitarian measures (many of them borrowed from fascism) as the banning of political parties, the dissolving of the National Assembly, the creation of an ideological body (the Directorate of Public Regeneration), and the disbanding of the free trade unions and their replacement with etatized trade unions seem less impressive, especially since the communist regime itself far exceeded them.

The lenient attitude is clearly seen in the discussion dedicated specifically to the character of the coup d'état on May 19, organized by the Institute of History of the Bulgarian Communist Party in 1969. Zhak Natan characterized very cautiously and ambiguously the views and the rule of the authors of the coup d'état and almost denied that it was fascist. According to him, the political circle Zveno aimed at strengthening the authority of the state for the preservation of "bourgeois-capitalist domination," while its program was in keeping with the contemporary fascist concepts of a strong and competent authority. The coup d'état itself is defined as a "military coup d'état with fascist tendencies." The subsequent evolution of the people of May 19 showed that among them were "healthy forces and patriotic elements" who later joined the Fatherland Front and participated in the building of socialism.²⁸ The attempt to exonerate the organizers of the coup d'état provoked the reaction of Veselin Hadzhinikolov at the same forum, but somewhat in defense (though well argued).²⁹ Thus ironically, the harder communist historians showed greatest leniency precisely toward the regime which, according to its institutional and ideological features, and in the radicalism of its intentions, if not in the success of their implementation, came closest to fascism.

²⁸ Zhak Natan, "Doklad. Harakter na 19-to maikiya prevrat prez 1934 g." (Report. Character of the coup d'état on May 19, 1934), *Izvestiya na Instituta po istoriya na BKP*, vol. 21, 1969, 219–225. In a similar vein, but more ambiguous, is Nedyu Nedev's report, made on the same occasion: "Burzhaozno-fashistki cherti na 19-to maikiya prevrat" (Bourgeois-fascist features of the coup d'état of May 19), *ibid.*, 225–231.

²⁹ Veselin Hadzhinikolov, "Izkazvane" (Contribution), *Izvestiya na Instituta po istoriya na BKP*, vol. 21, 1969, 249–264.

At the end of 1972, a meeting took place between Bulgarian and Polish historians on the initiative of the Institute of Balkan Studies of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences and the Institute of History of the Polish Academy of Sciences. Only a short announcement about the event appeared in the major journal *Istoricheski pregled* (Historical Review).³⁰ One can well surmise the reasons for this relative silence—namely, that Polish historians denied that the dictatorships in Central and Eastern Europe between the wars were fascist. Still, Polish historian Janusz Żarnowski's paper was published in the journal of the Institute of Balkan Studies. In it Żarnowski sides with the Polish historian Franciszek Ryszka and the Hungarian historian Miklós Lackó in characterizing the interwar regimes of Central and Eastern Europe as dictatorships and authoritarian systems but not fascist. He cites a number of arguments, the main one (in reference to Lackó) being that the relative economic and social backwardness in Eastern Europe prevented the creation of an alliance between bourgeois politicians and representatives of big business on the one hand and a mass fascist movement on the other. Instead, the old ruling classes stood firmly in power without having to seek the support of fascist movements and to share power with them. The authoritarian regimes fought against the leftist forces, the liberal opposition, and the fascist opposition, but the latter remained too weak to make a bid for power. The authoritarian regimes made an attempt to create a ruling party in their support, but such parties remained bureaucratic formations “from above,” lacking a broad social movement. Regarding the regime in Bulgaria, Żarnowski says briefly that defining it is, in the end, a task for Bulgarian historians.³¹

The conceptualization of fascism in Bulgaria became more flexible with the introduction of the term “fascization,” popularized by Vladimir Migeв precisely in connection with the regime of May 19 (in a work from 1977).³² Grammatically, as a noun derived from a verb, the term is dynamic and allows for seeing fascism as a process that can advance to different points; the regimes can thus be compared as to the degree of their fascization without implying that they have become fascist in their es-

³⁰ Echka Damyanova, “Pŭrva nauchna sreshta na bŭlgarski i polski istoritsi” (First scholarly meeting between Bulgarian and Polish historians), *Istoricheski pregled* 29, no. 2 (1973): 148–150.

³¹ Janusz Żarnowski, “Problema avtoritarnykh i diktatorskikh rezhimov v Tsentral’noi i Vostochnoi Evropy v period mezhdv dvumya mirovymi voynami” (The problem of authoritarian and dictatorial regimes in Central and Eastern Europe in the period between the two world wars), *Etudes balkaniques* 9, no. 2 (1973), 93–105.

³² Vladimir Migeв, *Utŭrzhdavane na monarkho-fashistkata*, 178–179.

sence. Migev associates the term “fascization” with a certain institutional model that he calls “fascist etatism” and defines it (with regard to Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany) with the following features: efforts of the rulers to include the population in mass organizations (the fascist party itself and other mass organizations); the shaping of minds according to a certain ideology of a strong authority, nationalism, etc.; state control over the economy; and the state acting as arbiter of social-class relations (through etatist trade unions and professional organizations).³³ Migev’s treatment of the regime that took power on May 19, 1934, demonstrates a certain approximation to this model in intentions, if not in realization, and thus a certain degree of fascization. However, the Nineteenthers could not build a “classical” fascist system on the Italian model, and fascization remained limited: the regime could not secure a mass political base or impose political functions on the trade unions; it remained state-bureaucratic (*kazi-onen*) and did not eliminate some bourgeois-democratic forms.³⁴

In 1983 the United Center of History hosted a discussion on “Fascism in the Balkans between the Two World Wars.” The full text of the presentations was not published, but only a summary, which showed that the discussion set Bulgarian fascism against a more general background and treated it in a comparative perspective, which allowed for a freer exchange of opinions. Also notable is the reference to authoritative foreign authors and views in the discussion. According to the synopsis, Krūstyu Manchev pointed out in his statement that fascism in Bulgaria existed as an ideology and in some small parties but did not attain power. He also pointed out that fascism in principle is anti-monarchic, and the Bulgarian monarch did not sympathize with the fascists (who remained in opposition).³⁵ This is the only direct statement I could find for the period before 1989 that denies that fascism ruled in Bulgaria. It was made by a Balkan-studies scholar in an oral form (not in his paper) and published in the journal *Historical Review* under the “scholarly communications” section, which was printed in small type and barely noticeable.

Authoritative foreign authors and theories of fascism inform a book on fascism by the historian Milen Semkov, which ends with an attempt to identify the overall characteristics of fascism, influenced by Ernst Nolte’s

³³ Ibid., 14–15.

³⁴ Ibid., 178–180.

³⁵ Yordanka Gesheva, “Nauchna diskusiya za fashizma na Balkanite” (Scholarly discussion on fascism in the Balkans), *Historical Review* 39, no. 4 (1983): 152–156, esp. 153, 156.

model of the fascist “negations.” But it contains no reference to Bulgarian fascism, so his claim (after 1989) to have introduced theoretical clarity about it is unfounded.³⁶

It was *Fascism*, the book by Zhelyu Zhelev, that attracted the attention of the broader public and the censors and turned its author into a dissident. The description of the political system of fascism (in Italy and Germany) mainly in terms of institutions and structures was correctly deciphered as an allegory and allusion to the socio-political realities of state socialism—the other variety of totalitarianism.³⁷

In the treatment of Bulgarian fascism, certain analytical distinctions and classifications were proposed. Thus the fascist regime (i.e., ruling fascism) in Bulgaria was subdivided into “military fascism” (Tsankov’s Democratic Concord government and the regime of May 19) and “monarcho-fascism” (after King Boris III removed the Nineteenthers and assumed control, at the beginning or at the end of 1935). Some authors even called King Boris III “Führer.”³⁸ There is also the notion of “non-party [*bezpartien*] fascism” in defining the regime from May 19, 1934, to September 9, 1944, because political parties were banned, and the governments were not composed of party politicians. On the other hand, there was the “party fascism” of political parties such as the National Social Movement (*Narodno sotsialno dvizhenie*) of Aleksandŭr Tsankov, who aspired to a party dictatorship. In the rivalry between the possible versions of fascist dictatorship, “monarcho-fascism” took the upper hand and was

³⁶ Milen Semkov, *Fashizmŭt, 1919–1939* (Fascism, 1919–1939) (Sofia: Narodna prosveta, 1979), esp. 212–241. Semkov later claimed that although he did not deal with Bulgarian fascism, he introduced theoretical clarity in the debates about it and even hinted at the similarities between fascism and communism. See Milen Semkov, “Fashizŭm – fashizmi; mitove i istoricheska istina” (Fascism—fascisms: myths and historical truth), *Demokraticheski pregled* no. 4–5 (1996): 389–397. But Semkov’s book contains no allegory or hints.

³⁷ Zhelyu Zhelev, *Fashizmŭt. Dokumentno izsledvane na germanskiya, italianskiya i ispanskiya fashizŭm* (Fascism. Documentary research of German, Italian, and Spanish fascism) (Sofia: Narodna mladezh, 1982). Zhelev describes at length the institutional makeup of fascism as a totalitarian system (such as one-party rule, statist trade unions, professional unions, and ideological propaganda), and what can be read between the lines is a description of state socialism.

³⁸ For example, Zhak Natan, “Harakter, sŭshtnost,” esp. 94; Fani Milkova, *Bŭlgarskata burzhoazna*, 105. Milkova calls Boris III the “Führer” of the Bulgarian nation and “Fascist No. 1 in Bulgaria.” See also Ilcho Dimitrov, “Tsaryat-fyurer (shtrikhi kŭm portreta mu)” (The king-Führer [lines to his portrait]), in V.D. Voznesenski, *Tsar Boris, Hitler i legionerite* (King Boris, Hitler, and the legionaries) (Sofia: Izdatelstvo na OF, 1971), 85–95.

realized in a non-party variant, while “party fascism” lost and remained in opposition.³⁹ Finally, the notion of “fascism in opposition” covers the various fascist formations that did not take part in government, though some aspired to power.

In considering the regimes presumed to be fascist, special attention is paid to the political groups and forces they were composed of. It is only logical that, for a given regime to be fascist, its leaders should profess fascist ideas. For obvious reasons, the first to come under scrutiny were the Military League and the politicians that carried out the coup d'état of June 9, 1923, as well as the renewed Military League and the political circle Zveno, which instigated the coup d'état on May 19, 1934. The problem is that the influence of fascist ideas among them was not very prominent and can be detected only among some of the leaders. There is also the case of Aleksandŭr Tsankov, whose ideas evolved to embrace (a kind of) fascism only afterwards. So though these formations were indiscriminately subsumed under fascism in the beginning, this label was subsequently rejected for most of them, except for Zveno (with certain qualifications).⁴⁰ In fact, this was one of the lines—purely empirical—of

³⁹ Stefan Radulov, “Osnovni techeniya v bŭlgarskiya fashizŭm” (Main currents in Bulgarian fascism), *Izvestiya na Instituta po istoriya na BKP*, vol. 63, 1989, 5–65, esp. 46–51. On “military fascism” in particular, see Stefan Radulov, “Voenniyat fashizŭm v Bŭlgariya (1919–1944)” (Military fascism in Bulgaria, 1919–1944). In *Bŭlgariya 1300. Institutsii i dŭrzhavna traditsiya* (Bulgaria 1300. Institutions and state tradition), vol. 3 (Sofia, 1983), 175–185.

⁴⁰ Velichko Georgiev, who has researched the National Concord (the predecessor and core of the Democratic Concord), is cautious in defining it as “a reactionary bourgeois formation, in which the rightist reactionary elements of the traditional bourgeois parties were mixed up with the emerging fascist elements.” Velichko Georgiev, “Narodniyat sgovor” (The National Concord), *Godishnik na Sofiyskiya universitet. Istoricheski fakultet*, vol. 68, 1979, 189–272, citation on 270, on the influence of the ideas of Italian fascism, 246. “Zveno” (Link) is characterized as a fascist organization by Velichko Georgiev, “Razvitie na politicheskata sistema na Bŭlgariya (1918–1944)” (Development of the political system of Bulgaria, 1918–1944), in *Bŭlgariya 1300. Institutsii i dŭrzhavna traditsiya* (Bulgaria 1300. Institutions and state tradition), vol. 1 (Sofia, 1981), 291–317, esp. 303, 305; Veselin Hadzhinikolov, “Oshte za fashizma,” 60. According to Ilcho Dimitrov, Zveno showed keen interest in the theory and practice of fascism, but underlined its Bulgarian character. Ilcho Dimitrov, *Bŭlgarskata demokraticna obshtestvenost, fashizmŭt i voinata* (The Bulgarian democratic public, fascism, and the war) (Sofia: Izdatelstvo na OF, 1976), 15. See also the characteristics of Zveno and of Tsankov’s movement in comparison by Vladimir Migeŭ, *Utvŭrzhdavane na monarkho-fashistkata*, 32–35; Vladimir Migeŭ, “Po nyakoi problemi na bŭlgarskiya fashizŭm” (On some problems of Bulgarian fascism), *Demokraticheski pregled*, no. 4–5 (1996): 398–408, esp. 401–403.

the erosion of the thesis of fascism in power before the fall of communism in 1989.

In the same vein, scholarly interest then turned to the plethora of right-wing organizations, most of them politically marginal, and the question was which of them, and to what extent, were fascist (with the odium this term carries) and which were just extreme rightist (“authoritarian”), ultra-nationalist, and so on. A special place among the rightist organizations is occupied by the National Social Movement created in 1931 by Aleksandŭr Tsankov, the only one to become a mass party for a time and to achieve considerable electoral success (third place in the local elections in 1934 with 11 percent of the votes) while individual members participated in (non-party) governments. It was claimed with considerable consensus that Tsankov’s movement was fascist, more precisely, that it borrowed ideas and methods from the Nazis (though Tsankov denied that), but without racism or anti-Semitism and with a number of Bulgarian specifics.⁴¹ Among the “peculiarities” of the movement are support of constitutionalism and parliamentary democracy (probably in the hope of attaining power through elections), an absence of anti-Semitism, and a focus on the village. The ideas of strong and competent (state) authority, pronounced etatism, and social reformism (or social demagogy) are not specifically fascist. What gives the appearance of fascism, however, is the stress on discipline and the Führer principle, a paramilitary structure, and efforts to attract the masses. However, some authors cast doubt on its fascist character, among them Ernst Nolte and some who have recently published in Bulgarian journals.⁴² In any case its road to power was barred by the coup d’état on May 19, 1934, and the royal dictatorship, so one can only guess how the movement might have developed.

⁴¹ After the early and preconceived characteristics, Tsankov’s movement was treated especially well and substantiated by Dimitrina Petrova, “Sŭzdavane i deinost na Tsankovoto dvizhenie (mai 1932–mai 1934 g.)” (Creation and activities of Tsankov’s movement, May 1932–May 1934), *Istoricheski pregled* 42, no. 6 (1986), 34–47. Tsankov himself denied any connection with fascism or Nazism and affirmed the autonomous and original character of his movement.

⁴² Ernst Nolte, *Die faschistischen Bewegungen* (Munich, 1979), 195–196; Ernst Nolte, *Die Krise des liberalen Systems und die faschistischen Bewegungen* (Munich: R. Piper, 1968), 240–241. See also Voin Bozhinov, “Narodno sotsialno dvizhenie—Sgovor 1932–1934 g.” (National Social Movement—Concord 1932–1934), *Istoricheski pregled* 63, no. 1–2 (2007), 114–133, esp. 124–126. Tsankov’s movement is characterized (in keeping with his statements) as a right-wing, anti-communist, and nationalist formation, but not fascist or Nazi, even if it sympathized with Nazism.

The “rightist current” was studied systematically by Nikolai Poppetrov, currently the foremost scholar on Bulgarian fascism. He classifies and characterizes extreme right-wing and fascist organizations in the following way.⁴³ The early Bulgarian Fatherland Defense (*Bŭlgarska rodna zashtita*) and “Kubrat” were proto-fascist, with still incomplete fascist character, but generating a fascist atmosphere; their inspiration, just as in Germany, was the “war experience.” The “Fatherland Defenders” were among the first to imagine the monarch at the top of a non-party regime, based on a Führer principle and on the support of the army; the monarch is assigned the role of Führer.

Full-fledged fascist organizations during World War II were the Union of the Bulgarian National Legions (*Sŭyuz na bŭlgarskite natsionalni legioni*) under General Hristo Lukov (and, after his murder by the communists, General Nikola Zhekov) and the Champions of the Advancement of Bulgardom (*Ratnitsi za napredŭka na bŭlgarshtinata*) of Aleksandŭr Belev (the commissar on the Jewish question) and Lyubomir Rusev. Their ideological arsenal consisted of the usual extreme nationalist and chauvinist, authoritarian, and totalitarian ideas, but still more pointed and intransigent to parties and parliamentary forms and to individualistic liberal ideas; more characteristically, they adopted the Führer principle and elitism, racism, and anti-Semitism. But the fascist ideas and the Führer principle in particular remained underdeveloped for the tactical purpose of adapting to the established royal regime. The Legionaries and the Ratnitsi were predominantly youth organizations.

⁴³ Nikolai Poppetrov, “Organizatsiite ‘Otets Paisii’ i ‘Bŭlgarska orda’ prez Vtorata svetovna voina” (The Otets Paisii and Bulgarian Horde organizations during World War II), *Istoricheski pregled* 43, no. 9 (1987): 32–49; Nikolai Poppetrov, “Ideino-politicheskite skhvashtaniya na ‘Sŭyuza na Bŭlgarskite natsionalni legioni’ i ‘Ratnitsi za napredŭka na bŭlgarshtinata’ v godinite na Vtorata svetovna voina” (The ideological-political views of the Union of the Bulgarian National Legions and the Champions of the Advancement of Bulgardom during World War II), *Istoricheski pregled* 47, no. 6 (1991): 53–67; Nikolai Poppetrov, “Bolgarskii fashizm,” 160–169; Nikolai Poppetrov, “Vodacheski skhvashtaniya v bŭlgarskiya desen politicheski potok” (Notions of leadership in the Bulgarian rightist political current), *Istoricheski pregled* 48, no. 1–2 (1992): 130–146; Nikolai Poppetrov, “Avtoritarizŭm – fashizŭm. Kŭm modela na politicheskoto razvitie na Bŭlgariya, 1918–1944 g.” (Authoritarianism–fascism. Regarding the model of the political development of Bulgaria, 1918–1944), *Istoricheski pregled* 53, no. 2 (1997): 25–48, esp. 39–47. On some rightist and fascist organizations in Bulgaria, also Velichko Georgiev, *Masonstvo v Bŭlgariya* (Freemasonry in Bulgaria). (Sofia: Nauka i izkustvo, 1986), 274–309. On the legionaries, Zhelyazko Kolev, *Sŭyuz na bŭlgarskite natsionalni legioni* (Union of the Bulgarian National Legions) (Sofia: Nauka i izkustvo, 1976).

Some extreme right-wing and fascist organizations were anti-Semitic (the Fatherland Defenders, Legionaries, Champions-Ratnitsi), while others criticized anti-Semitism (the National Social Movement, Kubrat, the Bulgarian Youth Union "Otets Paisii"). Some were in favor of constitutionalism (the National Social Movement, Kubrat), while others espoused corporatist and elitist ideas. Finally, some were entirely imitative, such as the National Socialist Bulgarian Workers' Party (which copied the German Nazis' program), the National Zadruga-Fascists, and the Union of Bulgarian Fascists, but these were insignificant.

One quite peculiar group was the chauvinist (but not fascist) elitist Bulgarian Horde, which expounded the thesis of a distinctive Bulgarian path originating directly from the military-tribal Bulgaria of the khans.

The All-Bulgarian Union "Otets Paisii" was purely nationalist, revisionist, and authoritarian in views. During the war it acquired pro-monarchist and even authoritarian-fascist attitudes. But on the whole this was a conservative-elitist organization of intellectuals, which aimed at nationalist propaganda and not at power. Though connected with it, the Bulgarian Youth Union "Otets Paisii" was quite autonomous and more extreme.

The amorphous circles Young Bulgaria (*Mlada Bŭlgariya*) and Nation and Politics (*Natsiya i politika*) of the so-called "third generation" around Lazar Popov and Stefan Popov were authoritarian, though not fascist. They championed ideas of a strong and resolute central authority and were attached to the monarchy.

Some of the extreme right-wing and fascist organizations created paramilitary formations of their own (Tsankov's movement, the Legionaries, the Ratnitsi), while others did not. The Legionaries were more inclined to collaborate with the royal regime, while the Ratnitsi stood in opposition and were repressed by the authorities.

The attempts of the regime to create a united youth state organization like the Italian *Balilla* or the German *Hitler Jugend*, however, remained incomplete and ineffective. The organization Brannik ("Warrior"), set up in 1941 to guide school youth and to rally existing youth organizations in support of the regime, fell far short of expectations.⁴⁴

⁴⁴ Vladimir Migeв, "Fashistkite mladezhki organisatsii i politicheskoto razvitiе na Bŭlgariya (1934–1939)" (The fascist political organizations and the political development of Bulgaria, 1934–1939), *Izvestiya na Bŭlgarskoto istoricheskoto druzhestvo*, vol. 29 (Sofia, 1974), 43–64. Also Vladimir Migeв, "Istoriya fashizma v Zapadnoi Evrope. Moskva: Nauka, 1978 (retsenziya)" (History of fascism in Western Europe. Moscow: Nauka, 1978 [review]), *Istoricheski pregled* 35, no. 2 (1979): 112–120, esp. 114. In this short review Migeв rejects the label of fascism for the Bulgarian right-wing organiza-

A recently published book by Nikolai Poppetrov summarizes his views on the Bulgarian fascist phenomenon.⁴⁵ Poppetrov traces the origins and the evolution of fascist ideas and organizations against the background of the general social-political situation and distinguishes three phases. The first is early fascism (or proto-fascism) through the initial acquaintance and propaganda of Italian fascism and the formation of the first Bulgarian organizational nuclei in the first half of the 1920s. The second is a phase of growing interest toward the fascist phenomenon and a rapid expansion of organizations in the second half of the 1920s and the first half of the 1930s. The third phase is a full-fledged fascist ideology (at that time mostly under Nazi influence) and larger organizations in the second half of the 1930s and during World War II. Poppetrov traces the relationships among the various organizations and the movement of leaders from one to another. While decommissioned officers initially predominated, they were later diluted in a heterogeneous mass of civilians, in which youth took a special role. The separate organizations are variously characterized as proto-fascist, pro-fascist, faschizoid, and manifestly fascist, as already mentioned. However, in defining the National Social Movement of Tsankov, Poppetrov wavers between “pro-fascist” (or “pro-Nazi”) and unambiguously fascist organizations (themselves subdivided into imitative and such with markedly national characteristics), in which Tsankov’s movement is placed in between and figures as an example of still-stronger local peculiarities and national colorations of fascism.⁴⁶

Poppetrov points to the following specifics of Bulgarian fascism: an underdeveloped Führer principle and party doctrine, accommodation to the role of the monarch and the established order, emphasis on Bulgarian distinctiveness and authenticity (*samobitnost*), and looking for inspiration

tions Kubrat, Rodna Zashtita (“Fatherland Defense”), Otets Paisii (“Father Paisii”), the Union of the Reserve Officers, the Military League, and Zveno (until the beginning of the 1930s).

⁴⁵ Nikolai Poppetrov, *Fashizmŭt v Bŭlgariya. Razvitie i proyavi* (Fascism in Bulgaria. Development and manifestations) (Sofia: Kama, 2008). The same author also edited a collection of the manifestos and programs of the Bulgarian right-wing organization: Nikolai Poppetrov, ed., *Sotsialno nalyavo, natsionalizmŭt – napred. Programni i organizatsionni dokumenti na bŭlgarski avtoritaristki natsionalisticheski formatsii* (The Left to the left, nationalism—march forward! Programs and organizational documents of Bulgarian authoritarian nationalist formations) (Sofia: Gutenberg, 2009).

⁴⁶ Nikolai Poppetrov, *Fashizmŭt v Bŭlgariya*, 15, 55–58, 116. Part of the difficulty in ascribing Tsankov’s movement to fascism comes from the fact that it did not attain power and was superseded by other fascist organizations, so that its eventual evolution can only be speculated on.

to the (national) Revival era in the nineteenth century, which came to replace the earlier cult of the proto-Bulgarian khans and the medieval kings. What is quite interesting is the inference about a growing role of the “social question” in the programs of the Bulgarian fascists (not noted earlier when communism had monopolized the social issues for itself or dismissed them as “social demagoguery” when they were put forward by other forces), which largely supplanted the national problem and the revisionism of the early postwar period. Also stressed is the anti-capitalist and anti-plutocratic character of fascism (again eclipsed in earlier communist interpretations for similar reasons) and the absence of significant ties with financial capital and big business (contrary to early dogma), which actually impeded its spread. Finally, fascism is not treated as retrograde and “reactionary” (though Poppetrov admits that such features are part of the movement) but as future-oriented and striving toward modernization. As a whole fascism and the Right in general are shown as a mighty trend in the interwar Bulgarian political spectrum, capable of inspiring and mobilizing considerable and socially heterogeneous masses and presenting a robust alternative to the extreme Left. Obviously, the post-communist (and strongly anti-communist) belittling of Bulgarian fascism had to subside before such an unbiased treatment of the phenomenon in its whole stature became possible.

“Monarcho-Fascism”

The last bastion of the concept of fascist rule (fascism in power) in Bulgaria was the so-called “monarcho-fascism” during World War II, especially after Bulgaria joined the Axis (March 1, 1941) and more precisely, during the governments of Bogdan Filov (February 1940–September 1943) and the subsequent governments of Dobri Bozhilov (September 1943–June 1944) and Ivan Bagryanov (June 1944–September 2, 1944). The general formula throughout, until 1989, read: “monarcho-fascism,” but it was mostly taken for granted, and the attempts to reveal what exactly this meant were quite sparing and schematic.⁴⁷ Apart from the alli-

⁴⁷ For example, in the discussion “On the bourgeois opposition and the character of Muraviev’s government,” especially in the report by Petür Avramov and the contribution of Mito Isusov. Still weaker argumentation in Donko Dochev, *Monarkhofashizmüt sreshtu narodnata süprotiva, 1941–1944* (Monarcho-fascism against popular resistance, 1941–1944) (Sofia: Partizdat, 1983), esp. 12–14.

ance with Nazi Germany (which will be considered later), the following fascist features and measures of the regime are mentioned. To begin with, there were pronounced adherents of Nazism and Germany in the cabinet, such as Premier Bogdan Filov and his minister of the interior, Petŭr Gabrovski. But in the same cabinet, Minister of Foreign Affairs Ivan Popov and Minister of War General Teodosii Daskalov had strong reservations about Nazism, and, above all, the government was entirely under royal control. In the same vein, the fascization of the administrative and the police apparatus (i.e., fascists in their personnel) is pointed out, as well as the increased official propaganda of fascism and the support lent to the regime by fascist organizations, such as the unions of the reserve officers and sergeants, and the Legionaries. Next, some fascist laws were adopted, especially the anti-Jewish Law for the Defense of the Nation. The attempt to deport the Jews, however, encountered strong resistance; it was thwarted within Bulgaria's old borders (where some 47,250 Jews lived), but about 11,000 Jews from the newly acquired territories were deported. Finally, and most importantly for communist historiography, the repression against the communists and the fight against the armed guerrilla resistance (the partisans) count as a major manifestation of fascism.

Bulgarian "monarcho-fascism" is best described in Ilcho Dimitrov's 1984 introduction to Bogdan Filov's *Diary*, which at the time provoked a strong reaction from hard-liners as almost an attempt at rehabilitation (which it certainly is not).⁴⁸ According to Dimitrov, anti-communism and anti-Sovietism constituted major ideological features of Bulgarian monarcho-fascism, which in practice translated into severe repression and terror against the communists. To this anti-Semitism as ideology and practice was added in the beginning of 1943, especially the deportation of the Jews from Macedonia and the (northern) Aegean coast. Dimitrov ascribes the rescue of the other Jews primarily to the mass anti-fascist action in their

⁴⁸ The work on Filov (intended as an introduction to Filov's *Diary*) first appeared in the literary journal *Plamŭk* (in 1984). On the sharp reaction it provoked among the former anti-fascist activists and in the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, see Ilcho Dimitrov, *Vsi-chko teche*, 206–209, 292–293. Filov was not rehabilitated in the least, but the reaction can be explained by the fact that the *Diary* voices (literally) another position (and presents the events in a different light), one the hard-liners would like to silence and exclude. Besides, the very fact of writing about Filov implies some attention to the "hero" and the circumstances. The head of state, Todor Zhivkov, himself intervened in the matter of the *Diary*'s publication and decided on a limited edition not for the market, but for "internal use" in libraries, that is, with special permission (as actually happened with the first edition in 1986). The book was reprinted after the fall of communism.

support, while the attitude of King Boris III (who was the truly decisive factor) is represented as ambiguous (and influenced by the warnings from the United States and Great Britain that he would be held responsible).⁴⁹ Other features of the regime were its anti-liberalism and the undermining of the authority of the National Assembly, the elimination of the party system, and the ban on the parties (starting in 1934), but Dimitrov de-emphasizes these. According to Dimitrov, the main peculiarity of Bulgarian monarcho-fascism and its concept of a “new state” was that the monarch was promoted as a supreme leader-Führer and accordingly became the object of a cult. The regime did not create an organized political support (mass party) but made use of traditional institutions, such as an elected (though weakened) National Assembly, while Nazi doctrine was adapted to national characteristics and traditions. The regime relied for its support mainly on the administration (which was accordingly politicized), along with some mass organizations, such as the trade unions, the union of the reserve officers, and the youth organization Brannik, though these remained largely “official” and apathetic. In short, two main features differentiated Bulgarian monarcho-fascism from the Nazi and the fascist models: “the non-party regime and the role of the monarch as supreme leader.”⁵⁰

Ilcho Dimitrov made special efforts to style the monarch as a “Führer,” starting with a short work from 1969 (published in 1971)⁵¹ up to his extensive introduction to Bogdan Filov’s diary (discussed above). Dimitrov presents King Boris III as a monarch who undertook the role of a “Bulgarian Führer”; the king was simultaneously a constitutional head of state and a “supreme leader” in the spirit of the fascist doctrine.⁵² The cult of the king-Führer was inculcated through mass propaganda and ended in mythologization. Dimitrov’s anti-monarchic penchant and bias are all too evident: not only does he assume that the interests of the dynasty stood for the king above everything else, but they are considered necessarily “egois-

⁴⁹ Various factors played a role in thwarting the deportation of the Bulgarian Jews, including public campaigns and, most notably, the actions of the deputy-chairman of the National Assembly, Dimităr Peshev. But this would not have been possible without King Boris III taking a role behind the scenes. See Dimităr Peshev, *Spomeni* (Memoirs) (Sofia: Gutenberg, 2004), 205–254.

⁵⁰ Ilcho Dimitrov, “Profesor Bogdan Filov i negoviyat dnevnik” (Professor Bogdan Filov and his diary). In Bogdan Filov, *Dnevnik* (Diary) (Sofia: Izdatelstvo na OF, 1990) (first published 1986), 5–188, esp. 68–70, 97, 120, 128, 142, 148–149, 151, 154, 162–163, 178 (citation on 178).

⁵¹ Ilcho Dimitrov, “Tsaryat-Fyurer,” 94–95.

⁵² Ilcho Dimitrov, “Profesor Bogdan Filov,” 108, 148–149, 151, 178.

tic” and incompatible with the interests of the state, without allowing for the possibility that those interests might coincide (if only for the simple reason that the king can hardly think of a future for his dynasty outside the country he rules).⁵³ It should be noted that Dimitrov later changed his views on the character of the regime and the king.

Also worth noting is the attempt of Dimitŭr Sirkov (in 1979) to account for the peculiarities of Bulgarian monarcho-fascism. Looking for something to fill the role of the absent pro-regime mass organization (party or movement), Sirkov comes to the curious view that the non-party state itself “assumed the functions of a political party,” insofar as it supervised the official (statist) trade unions and other mass organizations. At the administrative level there occurred a “contraction” of the system of rule and a change of proportions and functions among its separate parts: the National Assembly turned into an appendage to the executive; the monarch weakened the cabinet ending with a monarchical fascist dictatorship, in which the monarch became in practice a “political leader of a certain social class.”⁵⁴ This is an extreme example of where a preconceived idea may lead.

Supporting the notion that Bulgaria had a fascist regime is quite interesting as a strategy. The absence of defining features—or even of the main features—of fascism, such as a widely popular fascist party with a charismatic leader with a new type of legitimacy (according to the fascist doctrine—a direct embodiment of the “people’s will”⁵⁵), rather than deterring the adherents of this view, are explained away as specifics of Bulgarian fascism. And the (absent) Führer—because fascism without a Führer is unimaginable—is replaced by the king. Thus non-party monarcho-fascism becomes a national Bulgarian “variant” of the fascist phenomenon. Still, there are more adequate descriptions of the system, though within the obligatory framework of a “fascist rule.”

A description of the system of Bulgarian fascism against a broader comparative background and in dynamics is offered by Vladimir Migevev

⁵³ Ibid., 148, 169.

⁵⁴ Dimitŭr Sirkov, “Fashizmŭt na vlast. Belezhki kŭm harakteristikata na negovata politicheska sistema” (Fascism in power. Notes on the characteristics of its political system), in *Bŭlgariya v sveta ot drevnostta do nashi dni* (Bulgaria in the world from antiquity to the present), vol. 2 (Sofia: Nauka i izkustvo, 1979), 225–233, esp. 229–232.

⁵⁵ On the very different legitimation of the “leadership principle” (*Führerprinzip*) in the “Volksgemeinschaft” (national community), see Karl Bracher, *Die deutsche Diktatur. Entstehung, Struktur, Folgen des Nationalsozialismus* (Cologne and Berlin: Kiepenheuer und Witsch, 1970), 370–381.

(in 1979).⁵⁶ Migeu starts with a short characterization of the German, Italian, Iberian, Polish-Hungarian, and Balkan fascism. The Balkan type in particular is characterized by a weaker degree of fascization and a considerable mix of dictatorial with purely fascist elements (at least until World War II); the active participation of the army in political life, though the Balkan fascist systems (with the exception of General Metaxas's regime in Greece) were not juntas as in Iberia, where the army held power directly; it is restricted to purely state forms—"non-party fascism"; it is monarchical in its nature (Greece excepted), i.e., the monarch is the main pillar of the fascization, though without the status of a Führer.

Fascization in Bulgaria reached a higher stage with the coup d'état of May 19, 1934, but most of the components were built up only during World War II. Bulgarian fascism as a whole was rather weak and had a narrow social base. The main characteristics of the fascist state-political system were the following: de facto weakening of bourgeois parliamentarism and the subordination of the National Assembly to the executive; strengthening and centralization of the administrative apparatus, which became more effective and able to exert political pressure and violence; wide powers of the administrative and the police apparatus, whose personnel became increasingly fascized; streamlining of the political system through the "non-party regime"; organization of the population en masse through official (statist) professional organizations (without political functions, but with some economic and social functions) and a statist youth organization; the active interference of the state in the economy (especially in foreign trade and credit); and the state's interference in the relations between workers and employers (labor and capital) through collective labor contracts, state arbitration, and a ban on strikes and lockouts. The weakness of fascism in Bulgaria found expression in the incompleteness and imperfections of these same features. But this does not imply the instability of the established regime as such (Migeu still calls it fascist or monarcho-fascist)—only its fascist components were unstable and precarious. Finally, fascist rule borrowed some ideas and practices from bourgeois democracy, and because of its successful ideological propaganda, it managed to keep the broad masses in ignorance of its (fascist) nature—as they could not distinguish between fascism and democracy—and thus to neutralize them. Obviously it was not possible to say more than that in Bulgaria at that time and until the end of the communist regime. Because the regime controlled the public version of history, one

⁵⁶ Vladimir Migeu, "Myastoto na bŭlgarskiya fashizŭm," 101–110.

cannot be sure how far Migev had gone in rejecting the thesis of the rule of fascism in Bulgaria (and retrospective testimonies are dubious).

The Western authorities on fascism categorically deny that a fascist regime ever existed in Bulgaria.⁵⁷ Stanley Payne differentiates “three faces” of the political authoritarianism of the interwar period, namely a moderate or conservative authoritarian Right, a radical Right (which stands closer to fascism), and fascism. He identifies the regime of King Boris III as a moderate rightist authoritarian system under the crown—the type of regime that was typical of the Balkans in the 1930s. It is characterized by a break from the parliamentary forms, but without a radical breach of legal continuity and with only partial transformation of the system in a more authoritarian direction (with the adoption of some attributes and trappings of fascism). Furthermore, it is based on religion instead of some new cultural mysticism; characteristic of it are elitism and the idea of strong leadership, but moderated by traditional legitimations, avoidance of the formation of new elites and of introducing new features in the dictatorship, populism, and efforts toward economic development and modernization (shared by the other two categories and strongest in fascism). What is interesting here is the difference with the radical Right, which experiments with new and radical forms of authoritarianism and is ready to go further in forming new elites and introducing novelties (though not as far as fascism), but also looks for adherents among the established elites and often uses the military (though the conservative Right can rely on them even more), also aspires to modernization and sometimes becomes corporatist. In its views and actions, the Bulgarian regime that took power on May 19, 1934, was part of the radical Right.⁵⁸

Still, the Bulgarian case presents a puzzle for Stanley Payne, because a number of prerequisites existed for a more considerable fascist mobilization: the so-called “Prussia of the Balkans” was at war almost continuously from 1912 to 1918, lost two wars and territory, suffered heavy casualties, and faced strong economic and social tensions. Yet the only mass movement in postwar Bulgaria was the Agrarian movement, which was unquestionably peaceful. Payne’s proposed explanation is not quite con-

⁵⁷ On the German historiography on this issue, see Nikolai Poppetrov, “Die Geschichtsschreibung in die BRD über den Faschismus auf der Balkaninsel,” *Bulgarian Historical Review* 16, no. 3 (1988): 91–101.

⁵⁸ Stanley Payne, *Fascism: Comparison and Definition* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1980), 14–21, 119–121, 202–203; Stanley Payne, *A History of Fascism*, 326–327.

vincing—he cites the absence of a leader, and in his next book, cites land distribution, which favored social stability and a certain political tranquility.⁵⁹ As we saw in the previous chapter, the Agrarian regime was, in fact, quite revolutionary and—together with the communist mobilization—channeled the discontent of the masses and thus pre-empted a stronger fascist mobilization.

The well-known German historian of fascism Ernst Nolte also does not believe a fascist regime existed in Bulgaria, either after the coup d'état on June 9, 1923 (when National Assembly and a certain opposition existed), or after May 19, 1934, or the authoritarian dictatorship of King Boris III. As an explanation he cites the predominance of peasant smallholders and absence of land estates (hence of aristocracy) and of industries as well as the liberal tradition of the (national) Revival epoch.⁶⁰

The Oxford historian Richard Crampton, author of a standard history of modern Bulgaria, also says the personal non-party rule of King Boris III was not fascist or totalitarian. There was no ruling party; the National Assembly, manipulated though it was, always included opposition deputies; control over left-wing politicians was harsh, but there were restrictions on right-wing extremists as well; the press was allowed a certain room for criticism, and so on.⁶¹

The German Balkanist Holm Sundhaussen points to the traditionalism and paternalism of the “royal dictatorships” of the interwar Balkans. According to him, because of their predominantly peasant character, backwardness, and the difficulties for mass mobilization (including bad communications), the Balkan societies were structurally “incapable of fascism.”⁶²

It should be noted that authors from Eastern Europe (Hungary, Poland, and Russia) such as the aforementioned Miklós Lackó, Janusz Żarnowski, and Franciszek Ryszka, but also M. Yazhborovskaya, A. Ainekel, and others, contest the idea that fascist regimes existed in Eastern Europe and

⁵⁹ Stanley Payne, *A History of Fascism*, 326; *Fascism*, 120.

⁶⁰ Ernst Nolte, *Die Krise des liberalen Systems*, 239–242.

⁶¹ Richard Crampton, *A Short History of Modern Bulgaria* (Cambridge University Press, 1987), 128.

⁶² Holm Sundhaussen, “Die Königsdiktaturen in Südosteuropa: Umrisse einer Synthese.” In *Autoritäre Regime in Ostmittel- und Südosteuropa 1919–1944*, ed. Erwin Oberländer (Paderborn and Munich: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2001), 337–348, esp. 341–342. On fascism in the “successor states” (of the Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman empires), see Peter Sugar, ed., *Native Fascism in the Successor States 1918–1945* (Santa Barbara, CA, 1971). But Bulgaria is not included.

in South-Eastern Europe.⁶³ Lackó, for example, offers a good analysis of the regimes in the Balkans that he considers “bureaucratic military dictatorships.” The states were undergoing “modernization” in the interwar period, but the rulers kept the power in their hands (in defeated Hungary and Bulgaria after leftist attempts to take power). They were fighting against both the left-wing forces and the radical fascist movements, though they themselves tried to broaden their basis through fascization, which increased under the external influence of the fascist great powers. Lackó here underlines the mixed and “impure” character of the fascist movements, which combined conservative and extreme rightist traits with more “up to date” fascist traits, hence the wavering, indeterminacy, and inconsistency of these trends, which were pre-fascist, fascizoid, or manifestly fascist. Foremost among them was aggressive nationalism, but directed inwards, against minorities and for internal redistribution of wealth (not a racial theory or outward aggression), as well as social demagoguery.⁶⁴ However, these ideas were not accepted in Bulgarian historiography. At the international forums some (old-guard) Bulgarian historians defended the old ideas in debating with foreign authors, or just ignored them.⁶⁵ Finally, Bulgarian historiography risked defining Bulgaria as the only fascist state in the Balkans and in Eastern Europe between the wars.

Bulgaria and Hitler’s Germany

The wartime regime in Bulgaria is furthermore characterized and incriminated as fascist because of the alliance with the fascist Axis and the pursuit of pro-German policies. In fact, the main source of the concept of monarcho-fascism is wartime propaganda—communist and Western alike—against the pro-German policies of the Bulgarian state; from here it

⁶³ Miklós Lackó, *Le fascisme—Les fascismes en Europe centrale-orientale, XIII-e Congrès international des sciences historiques* (Moscow, 1970). See the contributions of M.S. Yazhborovskaya, Janusz Żarnowski, and A. Ainekél in fascism in Central and Southeast Europe in *Fashizm i antidemokraticheskie rezhimy v Evrope. Nachalo 20-kh godov—1945* (Fascism and the anti-democratic regimes in Europe. From the beginning of the 1920s to 1945) (Moscow: Nauka, 1981).

⁶⁴ Miklós Lackó, *K voprosu o fashizme v Yugovostochnoi Evrope* (On the question of fascism in Southeast Europe) (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1970), esp. 525–534.

⁶⁵ For example in the papers of Stoyan Petrov and Zhak Natan at the First International Congress of Balkan and Southeast European Studies. See *Actes du premier congrès international des études balkaniques et Sud-Est Européennes*, vol. 5, *Histoire* (Sofia, 1970), 229, 294.

later entered historical scholarship and was projected back to 1935, when King Boris III established his personal rule.⁶⁶ Of particular importance is the way in which Bulgaria joined the Axis and the degree of collaboration with Germany—the greater the readiness and “collaborationism,” the more discrediting the bond with Hitler’s Germany.

In the Stalinist *History of Bulgaria* (from 1955), the issues are presented in the following manner (in a chapter by Panayot Topalov and Nikifor Gornenski): there was a preliminary economic relationship with Nazi Germany, in which the Bulgarian economy adapted to the needs of German industry. From the beginning of the war, King Boris III, who stood at the head of the “German agents,” and his government made “feverish preparations” to join the Axis instead of accepting the Soviet Union’s offer for friendship and mutual assistance. All this was concealed behind declarations of peace and neutrality. Bulgaria joined the Axis on March 1, 1941, and the Nazis came seemingly as “allies,” but in fact they occupied the country and rapaciously plundered its economy. While this occupation was different in form from the occupation of Yugoslavia and Greece, in essence it was “the same servile situation.” From the very beginning, the Communist Party alone incessantly led a struggle against the monarcho-fascists; it denounced their treacherous policies, mobilized the workers and the masses, created the Fatherland Front, and organized the armed resistance. In view of Germany’s approaching collapse, Ivan Bagryanov was appointed premier in June 1944 under the slogan of strict neutrality. But behind this mask he continued to lend support to Germany; the “hellish goals” of his “machinations” were denounced by Georgi Dimitrov on Hristo Botev radio. Bagryanov opened negotiations with the United States and Great Britain for a separate peace and the “occupation of Bulgaria by Anglo-American troops” as one more attempt by the ruling bourgeoisie to preserve the fascist-capitalist regime. A last attempt of this sort was the “vile maneuver” of the government of Konstantin Muraviev, who “hypocritically” declared strict neutrality, which harbored the Nazi forces from the pursuit of the Soviet army while the repression against the partisans and their supporters continued. These policies brought Bulgaria to the edge of a new national catastrophe, from which it was rescued by the Soviet Union.⁶⁷

⁶⁶ On the broadcasting of BBC and the communist radio stations Hristo Botev and Narodn Glas, see Filip Panayotov, *Dvuboi v efira, 1941–1944* (Duel in the ether, 1941–1944) (Sofia: Partizdat, 1975).

⁶⁷ *Istoriya na Bŭlgariya v dva toma*, vol. 2, 747–808 (chapter by Panayot Topalov and Nikifor Gornenski), esp. 747–750, 755, 764, 805–806, 808, 820–822.

One aspect of this and other works deserves special attention: the historical actors are reduced to just two categories—the ruling fascists (with a fascized state apparatus) and anti-fascist forces under communist guidance. Moreover, the “people” as a whole are on the side of the anti-fascist resistance, if not actively participating, then at least passively sympathizing. The impression is created of an unpopular regime without public support, against which the whole nation (except for the ruling circles and the bourgeoisie) has risen in an epic struggle under communist leadership. The presumed popular support for anti-fascism would later undergo some class differentiation, but in all cases the bulk of the population would be with the anti-fascists (synonymous with communist forces).

The above ideas were developed in more detail with similar strong language in articles and monographs in subsequent years.⁶⁸ Special emphasis was laid on denouncing Ivan Bagryanov’s policies of an about-face as a demagogic maneuver to deceive the public while he continued pro-German policies and terror against the partisans.⁶⁹ In fact, the malevolence of hard-liner communist historiography toward him is due to his negotiations with the communists and their initial acceptance to participate in his government, which turned abruptly into denouncing his “demagoguery” following Georgi Dimitrov’s instructions from Moscow to break off the negotiations (in view of the orientation toward a power takeover by the

⁶⁸ L.B. Valev, *Bolgarskii narod v bor'be protiv fashizma nakanune i v nachal'ny period Vtoroi mirovoi voiny* (The Bulgarian people in the struggle against fascism on the eve and in the initial period of World War II) (Moscow, 1964), esp. 24–25, 34, 274–275, 288–289, 306–307, 337–339; Evgenii Kamenov, “Harakterni cherti na germano-fashistkata okupatsiya na Bŭlgariya prez 1941–1944 g.” (Characteristic features of the German-fascist occupation of Bulgaria in 1941–1944), *Istoricheski pregled* 22, no. 1 (1966): 3–21, esp. 3–4, 11, 14–15; Voin Bozhinov, “Borbata na bŭlgarskiya narod protiv fashizma i hitleristkata okupatsiya i pobedata na 9 septemvri 1944 g.” (The struggle of the Bulgarian people against fascism and the Hitlerite occupation and the victory on September 9, 1944), *Istoricheski pregled* 10, no. 5 (1954): 3–30; V.D. Voznesenski, *Hitler i legionerite* (Hitler and the legionaries) (Sofia, 1975), 26, 28–30.

⁶⁹ Especially viciously in the work of the communist leader Vasil Kolarov, “Bŭlgarskiyat narod v borbata mu za nova Bŭlgariya” (The Bulgarian people in its struggle for a new Bulgaria), *Istoricheski pregled* 1, no. 4 (1945): 253–284. Bagryanov is called the king’s lackey, a German agent, political charlatan, and morally and politically bankrupt (278–279). See also *Istoriya na Bŭlgariya v dva toma*, vol. 2, 805–808. This work states that in order to mask his maneuver, Bagryanov included in the government Prof. Doncho Kostov (a representative of the communists) and held him there against his will for a few days. See also Voin Bozhinov, *Politicheskata kriza v Bŭlgariya prez 1943–1944* (The political crisis in Bulgaria in 1943–1944). (Sofia: Izdatelstvo na BAN, 1957), esp. 74–75. Bozhinov admits that the Communist Party negotiated with Bagryanov.

communists alone). In the frankly naïve statement of Slavka Petrova, the government of Bagryanov, although fascist and pro-German, actually sought a way out and was ready to take Bulgaria out of the alliance with the Nazis. But precisely because of this, it presented a still greater danger for the anti-fascist movement and for the “fate of the coming revolution” than the brutally pro-Nazi government of Bogdan Filov.⁷⁰

The Communist Party version of the developments during World War II is fully fleshed out by Nikifor Gornenski, who adds some “theoretical” points. Gornenski’s main theoretical contribution (in tune with the new party tenet that the socialist revolution began with the takeover on September 9, 1944) concerns the character of the struggle led by the Communist Party, namely a coupling of the struggle for liberation from the Nazi occupation and the monarcho-fascist dictatorship with the revolutionary class struggle of the proletariat against capitalism and for socialism. The armed struggle was conducted under the banner of the Fatherland Front, whose program contained only democratic, anti-imperialist, and anti-fascist goals. But according to Gornenski there was no contradiction between the program of the Fatherland Front and the struggle for socialism (and dictatorship of the proletariat) because the enemies in both struggles were the same—the Nazi occupiers and the Bulgarian fascists; the big industrial, commercial and banking bourgeoisie; and the monarchy with its police and administrative apparatus. It was precisely the coupling of the struggle for socialism with the struggle against fascism (Bulgarian and German) that gave a much greater sweep and impetus to the revolutionary class struggle, which by itself met with serious hindrances. The communists waged the struggle with the strategic goal of socialism, fully conscious that if circumstances allowed, the rejection of foreign subjugation and the overthrow of the fascist dictatorship could turn into a starting point for the socialist revolution.⁷¹ Things are declared here clearly and

⁷⁰ Slavka Petrova, *Borbata na BKP za ustanovyavane na narodnodemokraticheska vlast, mai-septemvri 1944* (The struggle of the Bulgarian Communist Party for the establishment of popular-democratic rule, May–September, 1944) (Sofia: Izdatelstvo na BKP, 1964), 95. The frankness comes from Petrova’s full identification with the communist position and inability to assume that others might see things differently.

⁷¹ Nikifor Gornenski, *Vŭorŭzhenata borba*, esp. 313–315; Nikifor Gornenski, “Vŭorŭzhenata borba na bŭlgarskiya narod za osvobozhdenie ot hitleristkata okupatsiya i monarcho-fashistkata diktatura (1941–1944 g.)” (The armed struggle of the Bulgarian people for liberation from the Hitlerite occupation and the monarcho-fascist dictatorship, 1941–1944). In *Sotsialisticheskata revolyutsiya v Bŭlgariya* (The socialist revolution in Bulgaria) (Sofia: Izdatelstvo na BAN, 1965), 139–177, esp. 149, 151, 160,

openly—with the triumph of victory. The communist struggle for socialism, which during the war was veiled behind the struggle against fascism in the name of democracy, is revealed as the “strategic” goal, while the conjoining of the two is shown as a successful “tactic” of the communist victors.

After a time such candor and direct identification with the Communist Party position became uncomfortable, or at least insufficient. The developments were then interpreted in a different language, seemingly neutral, objective, and scholarly-theoretical, in which the communist actions flow from the “objective needs” of the situation and correspond to (scientifically tested) “social regularities.” The official *History of the Anti-fascist Struggle in Bulgaria* (from 1976) operates with the “theoretical” distinction between “basic” and “main” contradictions that supposedly existed simultaneously during World War II, with some differences between occupied and satellite states. The “basic” contradiction was between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie as antagonistic poles in a class society, and its solution pointed to a proletarian revolution and the building of a socialist formation, i.e., the maximal program and final objective of every Marxist-Leninist party. The “main” contradiction was between the people (defined as workers, petty bourgeoisie, the progressive intelligentsia, and the democratic part of the middle bourgeoisie) and fascism (of two components—the “invader-aggressor” and the “internal reactionary forces” of the ruling circles and collaborationists). This contradiction is considered the “main” one because it affected the vital interests of the people and because the realization of the “further major tasks of social progress” (implying socialism) could not proceed without its solution. That is why the immediate programs, the political tactics, and the most effective slogans of the Communist parties were connected with solving precisely this contradiction. The “scientific strategy of the Resistance” consisted of directing the main blow against fascism and of rallying all democratic and patriotic forces “under the banner of the idea of rescuing the Motherland,” hence the tactics of building united national fronts in the anti-fascist struggle. The prospects for the future—the transformation of the struggle for democracy into a struggle for socialism and a proletarian revolution—sat in the background of the communist programs for some time and depended on the circumstances and the proportion of forces.

163, 177. A brief mention of the combination of a struggle for national liberation with a social (class) revolution comes as early as 1954, in Voin Bozhinov, “Borbata na bŭlgarskiya narod,” 9.

As the argument runs, the struggle to resolve the main contradiction (the destruction of foreign and domestic fascism) was intertwined with the struggle to resolve the basic contradiction (the destruction of the bourgeoisie as a class). The link between the two was not accidental but was due to the fact that the struggle against the military-police dictatorship of fascism and of the most reactionary strata of the bourgeoisie would shatter the very foundations of the existing social system and the domination of the bourgeoisie as a whole. Thus the merging of the anti-fascist and the anti-capitalist struggles in a “united stream” was a tendency and a “regularity of the objective course of history.”⁷²

The revision of the hard-liner communist narrative started from separate issues. The enthusiastic joining of the Axis was the first to be contested in an especially radical way. This was done by Nikolai Genchev in his book *The Foreign Policy of Bulgaria 1938–1941*, published in 1968 and immediately destroyed, to appear in print only after the fall of communism (although some parts appeared in the University Yearbook around the time of the original publication).⁷³ The main theses, which are well substantiated, can be summarized as follows: from Munich to the beginning of World War II, Bulgaria followed a consistent course of peaceful revision of the Neuilly treaty (after World War I), neutrality, and non-interference, shared by all political groups, with the exception of some extremists. Furthermore, King Boris III actually detested Hitler. The joining of the Axis on March 1, 1941, took place after the longest possible postponement, under strong German pressure and an immediate military

⁷² *Istoriya na antifashistkata borba v Bŭlgariya 1939/1944* (History of the anti-fascist struggle in Bulgaria 1939/1944), vol. 1 (Sofia: Partizdat, 1976), 33–34, 37, 39–40 (in the introduction by Kiril Vasilev).

⁷³ Nikolai Genchev, *Vŭnshnata politika na Bŭlgariya 1938–1941* (The foreign policy of Bulgaria 1938–1941). (Sofia: Vektor, 1998). Separate parts of it made their way into press at the time, namely, Nikolai Genchev, “Vŭnshnopoliticheskata orientatsiya na Bŭlgariya v navecherieto na Vtorata svetovna voina (septemvri 1938–septemvri 1939 g.)” (The foreign political orientation of Bulgaria on the eve of World War II, September 1938–September 1939), *Godishnik na Sofiiskiya universitet. Filosofsko-istoricheski fakultet* 61 (1967), no. 3 (Sofia: 1968), 129–182; Nikolai Genchev, “Vŭnshnata politika na Bŭlgariya prez nachalniya period na Vtorata svetovna voina (1939–1941)” (The foreign policy of Bulgaria at the beginning of World War II, 1939–1941), *Godishnik na Sofiiskiya universitet. Filosofsko-istoricheski fakultet* 63 (1970), no. 3, Sofia, 1971, 301–441; Nikolai Genchev, “Vrŭshnato na Yuzhna Dobrudzha kŭm Bŭlgariya prez 1940 g.” (The return of Southern Dobrudzha to Bulgaria in 1940), *Istoriicheski pregled*, no. 6 (1969): 58–73. On the fate of the book, see Nikolai Genchev, *Spomeni* (Memoirs). *Izbrani proizvedeniya* (Selected works), vol. 5 (Sofia: Gutenberg, 2005), 240–251.

threat (a German army across the Danube) without a realistic alternative: going to war would mean defeat and destruction, while rejection of the pact with the Axis without going to war would lead to occupation. Alongside the consequences of being in the Axis (Bulgaria once again ended up among the defeated nations), there were two advantages: the country was spared destruction and did not send an army to the Eastern Front. To this Genchev adds an important (and clever) argument—the postponement of Bulgaria's joining for several months (from October 1940 to the beginning of March 1941) was an important diplomatic act and a contribution to the anti-Nazi struggle, because it eased Greece's situation under Italian aggression, encouraged the small states, and hampered German plans against the Soviet Union. Genchev does not omit the fact that, under conditions of immediate danger from Germany, the Bulgarian Communist Party continued to maintain (at the Seventh Plenum of its Central Committee in January 1941) the wrong Comintern thesis that the main danger was from Great Britain.⁷⁴

In the same vein, though more cautious, is a work by Vitka Toshkova, published in 1969 in *Istoricheski pregled* (Historical Review) under the heading (in small letters) “communications.” On the basis of vast archival material and other primary sources, Toshkova demonstrates that King Boris III and some ministers (Ivan Popov, Teodosii Daskalov) were deeply reluctant to tie the country to Germany. He attests to their quibbling and delays, their asking for guarantees and posing of conditions—all sharply at odds with the imposed interpretation.⁷⁵

The other authors sought to situate themselves between the two “extreme” opinions on the issue, one of which was patently wrong and the other politically unacceptable, developing a peculiar casuistry of “mediation.” Thus while agreeing in general (in a work of 1972) with Genchev's thesis regarding the foreign political course of “neutrality and non-commitment,” Ilcho Dimitrov opines that neutrality and non-commitment should not be taken as absolute and that the foreign policy was “gradually pushed by the ruling circles into the course of the aggressive politics of the fascist states.”⁷⁶

⁷⁴ Nikolai Genchev, *Vŭnshnata politika na Bŭlgariya 1938–1941*, esp. 59–60, 173–177, 182–183.

⁷⁵ Vitka Toshkova, “Prisŭedinyavane na Bŭlgariya kum Tristranniya pakt” (Bulgaria's joining of the Tripartite Pact), *Istoricheski pregled*, no. 4 (1969): 56–71.

⁷⁶ Ilcho Dimitrov, “Bŭlgarskata demokraticzna obshtestvenost, fashizmŭt i voinata, 1934–1939” (The Bulgarian democratic public, fascism, and the war, 1934–1939), *Godishnik na Sofiiskiya universitet. Filosofsko-istoricheski fakultet* 64 (1970) no. 2, (Sofia, 1972), 232.

The evolution of Dimitŭr Sirkov is particularly instructive. He started from a strongly Germano-petal understanding and then gradually and painfully moved towards a more Germano-fugal one, stopping at various points in the search for the (politically) correct formula, which he finally defined as “neutrality in favor of Germany” understood as “a neutrality whose tendency toward rapprochement and bonding with Germany continually grew until Bulgaria finally entered the Tripartite Pact [the Axis]”; “a neutrality that contained in itself a continuously growing pro-German nucleus.”⁷⁷ To cite just one of the intermediary points (of 1972): the Bulgarian government passed from “a timid resistance to a coerced consent” and soon afterwards to a “conscious and zealous collaboration with the Hitlerites” and even began to “kowtow to the Hitlerites in order to win their favor.” As for the preliminary condition that Bulgaria should not take part in German military operations, Sirkov does not credit it to the government, which he says was simply powerless to make the Bulgarian people participate in the wars of the Axis.⁷⁸

Here is one more opinion (from 1984) on Bulgarian-German relations in the prewar years, which brings up the importance of the national question from a national(ist) point of view. Georgi Markov calls the Bulgarian attitude a “sympathizing neutrality,” characterized as “active against self-isolationism, awaiting events, and temporary, due to the force of circumstances.” At the same time Markov underlines the revisionist tendency of both Germany and Bulgaria in fighting the Versailles peace treaties (“Paris’s dictates”); the French-British politics of defending the status quo in practice helped the German efforts to attract Bulgaria and “condemned” Bulgaria to collaboration with the Third Reich. However, the approach to the national question was different—direct in the case of Germany; moderate, restrained, and patient in the case of Bulgaria.⁷⁹ This is enough to illustrate the historiographical treatment of Bulgaria’s adherence to the Axis and its stakes.

⁷⁷ Dimitŭr Sirkov, *Vŭnshnata politika na Bŭlgariya, 1938–1941* (The foreign policy of Bulgaria, 1938–1941) (Sofia: Nauka i izkustvo, 1979), 8–11, 302–304.

⁷⁸ Dimitŭr Sirkov, “Kŭm vŭprosa za prisŭedinyavaneto na Bŭlgariya kŭm Tristranniya pakt” (On the issue of Bulgaria joining the Tripartite Pact), in *Bŭlgaro-germanskii vrŭzki i otnosheniya. Izsledvaniya i materialy* (Bulgarian-German relations and ties. Research and materials), vol. 1 (Sofia: Izdatelstvo na BAN, 1972), 435–466, esp. 461–466, citations on 462.

⁷⁹ Georgi Markov, *Bŭlgaro-germanskite otnosheniya 1931–1939* (Bulgarian-German relations, 1931–1939) (Sofia: Nauka i izkustvo, 1984), esp. 155, 189, 214, 233–236, citation on 234.

The relations with Nazi Germany during the war are of primary importance in characterizing the Bulgarian wartime regime as fascist. Central here is its willingness to collaborate and the record of positive and negative points, of resisting Hitler's pressure or making concessions. But before considering this, there is the general issue of Bulgaria's status and the degree of the country's dependence upon Germany, variously described as either occupation or relative independence. The stakes for this issue are even more important, as they are related to the possibilities of deploying a guerrilla (partisan) resistance against the regime.

The already considered initial version reads "occupation" (or, slightly weaker, "de facto occupation"). This seems to have been contested for the first time in Ilcho Dimitrov's article of 1964.⁸⁰ A special discussion was organized in 1969 on the status of Bulgaria during World War II around the question of whether it was an occupied country or a "satellite" country (in the sense of being formally independent, but in reality subjugated to the Third Reich).⁸¹ The keynote speaker, Nikifor Gornenski, reinforced his previous opinion that there had been an occupation—initially a "de facto peaceful occupation" and later on a military occupation as well. According to the co-speaker, Stoyan Petrov, the country was not occupied, but strongly dependent and a satellite (an opinion shared by Ilcho Dimitrov and Slavka Petrova, among others). Besides adducing facts of various nature and import, some authors (Gornenski in particular) refer directly to statements and assessments of the Communist Party from the times of the partisan resistance or later to make their point, while others avoided them or considered them propaganda "tactics" of the times (asserted in view of their effectiveness, but not reflecting the actual state of affairs).

The occupation "argument" of Gornenski in a somewhat later work speaks for itself: "The assessment of the Bulgarian Communist Party of a 'de facto occupation' was correct and necessary. Without it, it would not be possible to justify the change in the party's tactics from a struggle for

⁸⁰ Ilcho Dimitrov, "Poslednoto pravitelstvo," 3. The author writes about Hitlerite Germany and "its satellite regime in Bulgaria," and not about German occupation, but Bulgarian fascist authorities. See also his memoirs where he claims priority in contesting the occupation thesis: Ilcho Dimitrov, *Vsichko teche*, 120.

⁸¹ "Polozhenieto na Bŭlgariya po vreme na Vtorata svetovna vojna" (Bulgaria's status during World War II), *Izvestiya na Instituta po istoriya na BKP*, vol. 21, (Sofia, 1969), 273–327. The keynote speaker was Nikifor Gornenski (273–281, concluding address 306–327); Stoyan Petrov (281–288) was co-speaker, and there were other contributions.

peace, neutrality and national independence toward a 'struggle against the imperialist war, and against the warmongers in the Balkans' ...⁸²

Gornenski takes the status of occupation for granted on the strength of a declaration of the Communist Party (March 6, 1941), thus identifying his scholarly stance with the party viewpoint (even though he sees it as "tactics") without making his own judgment. This is not even the academically undesirable but often uncontrolled interference of one's own biases, but a direct and pious acceptance of party propaganda without keeping one's distance or personally appraising the facts.

It is hardly necessary to cite the facts pointed out in the discussion, some of which attest that Bulgaria was highly dependent on Germany, while others attest the contrary, that the Bulgarian government preserved considerable latitude of action. It is clear as a whole that the dependence can be judged differently within a relatively wide spectrum (excepting, of course, full independence) depending on the weight assigned to certain facts; besides, it varied with the situation at the front and weakened with the German defeats. But the main thing is that no matter how it is judged, there was no occupation (*de jure* or *de facto*) by German troops. There was no puppet (or quisling) regime either, meaning one selected and installed by Hitler, as in Slovakia or Norway or Croatia. Even collaborationism of the Vichy type of regime was absent. What there was instead was a regime with its own prewar history, local roots and legitimacy, perhaps strongly dependent and a "satellite," but at the same time a "self-willed ally" of Hitler (as the title of a book by a German author has it⁸³).

But the most troublesome point in the discussion was another one, and in an unspoken way everything revolved around it: to what extent Bulgaria's status allowed for the deployment of the anti-fascist partisan resistance and against whom exactly it was directed (of course, with a firm belief in its legitimacy). As Stoyan Petrov clearly stated, the armed resistance was hampered precisely by the absence of a *de facto* occupation by German troops (in contrast to neighboring Yugoslavia and Greece), by Bulgaria's staying out of the war, and also by the realization of national ideals through the country's absorption of Macedonia and the Aegean coast. All this helped preserve the loyalty of the fascist administration and police to the government, fostered patriotic attitudes among much of the intelligentsia and the youth, and led to "political disorientation" of the

⁸² Nikifor Gornenski, *Vŭorūzhenata borba 1941–1944* (The armed struggle, 1941–1944) (Sofia: Izdatelstvo na BKP, 1971), 34.

⁸³ H.J. Hoppe, *Bulgarien–Hitlers eigenwilliger Verbündeter* (Stuttgart, 1979).

working people. His conclusion is that the Bulgarian Communist Party had to incite the working class and all working people to engage in armed struggle amid extremely difficult internal conditions, because the struggle had to be waged not immediately against foreign invaders and occupiers, but against the “internal oppressor”—Bulgarian fascism. Thus in its social composition the partisan movement had a markedly “class-party [i.e., not nationwide—R.D.] character.”⁸⁴ Jargon aside, this is a euphemism for the weakness of the resistance.

It is for that reason that the Bulgarian Communist Party, on the instructions of its Foreign Bureau in Moscow, used the tactic of emphasizing the “occupation” of the country or the “danger of occupation” (on the example of Hungary) and even the not-quite-convincing danger of an internal fascist coup d’état. With the same goal of strengthening the resistance, the Communist Party began to promote the national aspect of the struggle against fascism and give it a national-liberation character (against Germany), which made the assertion of occupation all the more necessary.⁸⁵ We will return to that question when considering the resistance.

The debated issue was resolved in the official *History of the Antifascist Struggle in Bulgaria* in favor of a “satellite” position. But it is described as almost complete dependence as follows. Common to all the satellites, including Bulgaria, was the descent into economic, political, and military dependence; the establishment of a “blood tie” between the aggressor and the local reactionary capitalist circles; the rule was formally in the hands of a national government, but the external master effectively plundered and oppressed the people with the help of the satellite state’s institutions (“organs”), which were its “tentacles.” Bulgaria in particular lost much of its sovereignty and fell into a severe military-political dependence; despite all the maneuvers, the country remained a servant of German imperialism.⁸⁶

Relations with Germany and the degree of collaboration are also treated in detail. More facts came out over time, though some were typically exaggerated, others underestimated or passed over in silence, while others remained ambiguous. Rather than presenting individual authors, here is a

⁸⁴ “Polozhenieto na Bŭlgariya,” 288, 304–305.

⁸⁵ “Polozhenieto na Bŭlgariya,” 286–287 (paper by Stoyan Petrov).

⁸⁶ *Istoriya na antifashistkata*, vol. 1, 31–34, 48.

“combined” and generalized picture. On the asset side of the regime’s record, there stand typically: the taking back (and keeping after the war) of Southern Dobrudja; the preservation of the country from destruction (including destruction by the Soviet army); the non-participation in Wehrmacht combat operations on the Eastern Front and in the Balkans); the maintenance of diplomatic relations with Russia until the very end (quite important for communist historiography); good relations with Turkey and thus avoiding being drawn into the war; the saving of the Jews (47,250 in all) from the old territories; and the comparative independence of the regime.

On the liabilities side of the regime, “costs” for the peace and concessions to Germany include allowing German troops to pass through Bulgaria on their way to Yugoslavia and Greece; occupation of part of Eastern Serbia by the Bulgarian army (some authors also include the occupation of Vardar Macedonia and Aegean Thrace, while others implicitly regard this as liberation of the irredenta); supplying Germany and the German bases in Bulgaria; the declaration of war on Great Britain and the United States (hence the bombing of Sofia); the deportation of the Jews (11,459 in all) from the “new territories”; and perhaps most importantly, the brutal fight against the guerrilla resistance (partisans, underground resistance groups, and their supporters) organized by the Communist Party. Some authors then reason counterfactually: was it not possible to make lesser concessions?

Among the ambiguous facts rarely mentioned in the historiographical accounts during socialism are national unification and the occupation functions of the Bulgarian army in Macedonia and Aegean Thrace. To state this baldly: should the absorption of Macedonia (from Yugoslavia) and Aegean Thrace (from Greece) be regarded as “occupation” or as “liberation” and “unification”? The euphemism “fulfillment of occupational functions” in a “purely technical” sense of deployment of troops has sometimes been used, but it hardly solved the problem. After the early communist denunciation of “Great Bulgarianism” and chauvinism, the ambiguity of national unification for Bulgarian national historians was not due to the more violent repressions in the “new territories” (e.g., the suppression of the revolt in Drama, usually not mentioned⁸⁷), but rather to the

⁸⁷ Except for foreign authors, e.g., Marshall Miller, *Bulgaria during the Second World War* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1975), 126–130. Only after the fall of communism was a Bulgarian work on the topic published: Georgi Daskalov, *Dramskoto vŭstanie 1941* (The Drama uprising, 1941) (Sofia: Universitetsko izdatelstvo “Sv. Kli-

fact that it was annulled after the war because it resulted from agreement with Hitler's Germany, in contrast to the formal mutual agreement (though under German pressure) between Bulgaria and Romania for returning Southern Dobrudja to Bulgaria. For most authors the issue remained politically sensitive after communism, probably because of the new political (liberal) correctness. Georgi Markov seems to have been among the few to speak unequivocally from a national(ist) perspective about "newly liberated lands," Bulgarian troops being greeted with flowers, and a Bulgarian "resurrection"; he links this with the previous wars fought for the irredenta (so that unification was not a "gift" from the Germans).⁸⁸

This overview shows only the "qualitative" aspect of things—which is positive and which is negative, therefore forming the asset or liability side of the balance sheet of the Bulgarian "fascist" government. In this quasi-bookkeeping, quasi-juridical metaphor, the "scales" of the historical appraisal of the regime will tilt in a different direction depending on the "weight" of the separate gains and losses—more precisely, of their sum totals. But there is no common standard for quantitative measuring of the facts, and this is where the historian comes in to assign a certain "weight" to one fact or another, with the inevitable imparting of his sympathies and value judgments. Thus the casualties of the partisans have an enormous incriminating weight for the communist hard-liners, yet zero weight is given to the casualties on the other side of the barricade, and there is an underestimation of the Bulgarian army casualties (which are ten times as great) incurred in joining the war against Germany after September 9, 1944. Everybody counts only his own—partisans and communist historians in their steps.

We can also look at the unanimous consensus of the historians from the early Stalinist years on the otherwise so difficult question of "choosing" sides, namely the strong and unconditional condemnation of Bulgarian "monarcho-fascism" for joining the Axis. There is no question here of weighing gains versus losses; this is instead a radical rejection of the old (monarchical, pro-German) regime in favor of the new communist pro-

ment Okhriski," 1992), esp. 210–212. Georgi Daskalov accepts the figure of around 3,000 victims on the basis of data from police reports (as opposed to the much bigger casualties cited by Greek historiography). See also Dimităr Yonchev, *Bŭlgariya i Belomorieto, oktovri 1940–9 septemvri, 1944 g.* (Bulgaria and the Aegean, October 1940–September 9, 1944) (Sofia, 1993), esp. 82–85.

⁸⁸ Georgi Markov, *Bŭlgarskata istoriya vkratse* (Bulgarian history in brief) (Sofia: Izdatelstvo "Svyat," 1992), 258–259.

Soviet regime, which does not allow any consideration of benefits and damages. The case is prejudged on political and ideological grounds. The ruling circles had to reject the alliance with Germany (whatever the cost) and to accept the pact of friendship and non-aggression offered by the Soviet Union, even if the country would then be overrun by the German army and occupied (in fact, this would be even better for the deployment of the partisan resistance).⁸⁹ Only later would there be attempts at distancing and “cost-benefit” analysis, which also do not exist in a vacuum but most often are affiliated with the national point of view (of what would be good for the nation as a whole) in analyzing the circumstances and the available options, and in assessing the decisions of the government in view of the consequences.

The historiographical evolution consists of the greater attention paid to some positive aspects of the politics of the regime, alongside the negative ones, especially the avoidance of sending troops to the Eastern Front (and others mentioned above). Another feature of the revision is stressing German pressure (instead of Bulgarian willingness) as the main reason for concessions by the regime, as well as Bulgarian attempts to deflect or postpone or soften the carrying out of many German demands or even agreements. Furthermore, the regime’s politics is considered as it evolved, in view of the international setting and the situation at the fronts; this allows for a revision of the thesis of complete dependence and blind following of German instructions; the negotiations for an exit from the war are also taken seriously (and not as “demagogy”). Here are some examples.

In his 1984 work on Bogdan Filov, Ilcho Dimitrov defines the regime in Bulgaria as “collaborationist.” Bogdan Filov himself was a believer in Nazism. But this does not mean that he and his colleagues in the government were German agents; they sincerely believed that they were acting in the national interest and that collaboration with Germany was in accordance with that interest. Thus the “historical verdict” is not against “abject paid foreign tools, but against persons, a class, and a politics that, because of class, party, and personal limitations, could not see where Bulgaria’s true interests lay.” Participation in the Axis as a satellite did not formally impair national independence and the freedom of action of the Bulgarian government; Bulgarian state institutions and laws were in force. Relations between the Nazis and the Bulgarian monarcho-fascists rested upon mutual interest and mutual trust; the various obligations were carried out

⁸⁹ This sort of argument in Dimităr Sirkov, “Kŭm vŭprosa za prisŭedinyavaneto,” 461–466.

conscientiously, and gradually a political and ideological transformation took place in the spirit of National Socialism. Thus according to Dimitrov, collaborationism was a “conscious, voluntary, and permanent politics of Bulgarian monarcho-fascism,” though accompanied by a “stubborn refusal” to take part directly in the war.⁹⁰

Vitka Toshkova’s work *Bulgaria and the Third Reich* presents a good illustration of an advanced stage of “revision.” Bulgarian-German relations are considered within the dynamic of the international situation and the course of the war; Toshkova shows the Bulgarian government’s reluctance to tighten, and fear of tightening, the alliance with Germany and the various maneuvers in evading or minimizing new commitments; she also points to some Bulgarian successes. The bona fide national character of the politics (i.e., not as “demagoguery”) is underlined, given a certain perception of the national goals and the best way to achieve them. The negotiations with Great Britain and the United States for an exit from the war are traced and their refusal to accept the Bulgarian territorial acquisitions is pointed to as a major obstacle to an agreement.⁹¹ Thus a very different image of the wartime regime is created. The very perspective of the narrative, from the standpoint of the Bulgarian government and on the basis of official documents, renders the events as they were seen and evaluated by the persons in office rather than viewing them from the vantage point of the illegal Communist Party or from Moscow, as unquestionably accepted in the earlier historiography. The documents used strongly precondition the account of the “facts” and the picture of the situation: they look one way from the official state sources and another way from the analyses and declarations of the clandestine Communist Party.

The treatment of the regime’s status by a prominent scholar of fascism such as Stanley Payne is also of interest. He differentiates between puppet regimes of local fascists, installed directly by the Germans (like the Ustaša regime in Croatia, the Arrow Cross regime in Hungary after the German occupation, and Quisling in Norway) and satellite regimes, produced by internal forces (as in Romania, Hungary, Slovakia, and Vichy in France). But he considers Bulgaria (and Spain) to be “semi-neutrals” on the side of the Axis, i.e., in a lesser degree of dependence. According to him the entirely different outcome of the war, namely the survival of the

⁹⁰ Ilcho Dimitrov, “Profesor Bogdan Filov,” 90, 92, 129, 130–131, 150, citations on 90, 130, 131.

⁹¹ Vitka Toshkova, *Bŭlgariya i Tretiya Raikh* (Bulgaria and the Third Reich) (Sofia: Nauka i izkustvo, 1975).

more strongly fascized regime of Franco in contrast to the regime in Bulgaria, was due simply to location—Bulgaria was in the path of the advancing Red Army, and Stalin had no scruples in declaring war, while the Western Allies, in spite of their antipathy to Francoism, were not willing to intervene in a country with which they were not at war.⁹²

The attempts at an about-face in foreign policy to work out a separate peace and exit from the war attract special attention. These attempts were crippled by the fear of German occupation (the Hungarian precedent) and by the refusal of the Western Allies, toward whom the ruling circles directed their efforts (especially because Bulgaria was not at war with the Soviet Union), to recognize Bulgaria's territorial acquisitions. What is of interest here is not so much how and when the "probing" and the more serious attempts at an about-face began (there is a hypothesis that King Boris III had serious intentions to this end shortly before his death⁹³), but the representation of these efforts in the historiography. A main indicator is the treatment of Ivan Bagryanov, who was appointed premier (by the regency) with the idea to effect the about-face. As we saw, for a long time his efforts were presented as pure demagoguery in line with the refusal of the communists to cooperate; the initial consent of the communists (if semi-avowed) was treated as falling into the trap of his demagoguery and a mistake.

The change makes itself felt in a work by Ilcho Dimitrov (dating back relatively early, to 1967) dedicated specifically to Bagryanov (but barely noticed at the time). The main point is that Bagryanov's intention to make an about-face in foreign orientation was meant sincerely and seriously. Dimitrov shows the difficulties and, in the end, the impossibility of gradual extrication from the war: maintaining relations with the Soviet Union while gradually moving away from Germany, yet without an abrupt break with Germany and without a "double game" (as Badoglio played in Italy). Bagryanov's efforts to avoid conflict with the Soviet Union actually depended not on him, but primarily on the Soviet side. Dimitrov mentions for the first time all the positive measures taken by Bagryanov, such as withdrawal of the occupation corps, safety for the Jews, the declaration of strict neutrality, the evacuation of the German airplanes and ships from the Varna port, and the opening of secret informal negotiations for peace with Great Britain and the United States (Stoicho Moshanov's mission in

⁹² Stanley Payne, *A History of Fascism*, 391–429 (puppet regimes and satellite regimes), 429–437 (Bulgaria and Spain).

⁹³ Vitka Toshkova, *Bŭlgariya i Tretiya*, 112–113, 125–127.

Cairo, later communicated by the government to the Soviet Union). However, Bagryanov's policies of awaiting and delay failed because of the rapid progress of military action, which took the initiative out of his hands. Furthermore, Stalin would not be satisfied with the actions of the Bulgarian government, including its agreement to break its alliance with Germany. From a pro-Soviet position, Dimitrov points out that the main goal of Bagryanov was the preservation of the regime, of capitalism and the monarchy, by avoiding the intrusion of the Soviet army and the installation of a communist regime in Bulgaria. His policies were dominated by "anti-Sovietism" (a term, of course, meant negatively).⁹⁴ After 1989 Ilcho Dimitrov reworked his book on Bagryanov without changing substantially the positive view of his politics, but increasing his empathy to the point of identification.

Anti-Fascism and the Struggle against Fascism

The anti-fascist struggle in Bulgaria is dated in tandem with the supposed appearance of fascism in 1923, when no less than the "world's first anti-fascist uprising" took place.⁹⁵ Anti-fascism in Bulgaria thus almost predates fascism, but this is so elsewhere as well, the purpose being a communist mobilization of the left forces and broader masses.⁹⁶ In the beginning the historians simply echoed the communist leaders, who for their part showed the historians the right way. In an article entitled "The Two Septembers," General Secretary Vŭlko Chervenkov treats the issue as follows: the (communist) September Uprising of 1923 was the Bulgarian people's first attempt to crush fascism at its emergence, and after an "uninterrupted and ever-growing" struggle, the uprising of September 9,

⁹⁴ Ilcho Dimitrov, "Vŭnshnata politika na Ivan Bagryanov (1 yuni–1 septemvri 1944 g.)" (The foreign policy of Ivan Bagryanov, June 1–September 1, 1944), *Godishnik na Sofiiskiya universitet*, vol. 12, no. 3. *Istoriya*, 1967, esp. 194–199, 208, 238–239, 253–255, 268–271. After Ilcho Dimitrov there is a relatively fair treatment of Bagryanov in Vitka Toshkova, *Bŭlgariya i Tretiya*, 186–189.

⁹⁵ Yono Mitev, *Fashistkiyat prevrat na Deveti yuni* (1978 edition), esp. 358–363. The June Uprising is defined as anti-fascist and is linked with the September Uprising as having prepared the "united front" between the workers and the peasants. See also Yono Mitev, *Vŭorŭzhenata antifashistka borba v Bŭlgariya, 1941–1944* (The armed anti-fascist struggle in Bulgaria, 1941–1944). (Sofia: Narodna prosveta, 1981), esp. 13, 100; Nedyu Nedev, *Za haraktera na Septemvriiskoto vŭstanie 1923* (On the character of the September Uprising) (Sofia: Izdatelstvo na OF, 1973), 111–129.

⁹⁶ See Stanley Payne, *A History of Fascism*, 495.

1944, finally led to its collapse: “There is thus a direct connection between the two Septembers of 1923 and 1944. The first began the struggle for the overthrow of fascism, and the second carried it to a successful end.”⁹⁷

In fact, there were three anti-fascist uprisings, if we include (as Yono Mitev and other authors do) the June Uprising of 1923 of supporters of overthrown Agrarian leader Aleksandŭr Stamboliiski. This is only logical if the coup d’état on June 9, 1923, was fascist. The uprisings are just the pinnacles of the anti-fascist struggle. Between them lies the routine but continuous anti-fascist struggle under the leadership of the Communist Party. The latter sought to organize broader anti-fascist coalitions in the form of the “united front” (*edinen front*) of workers and peasants under communist direction (as in the September Uprising of 1923), a still broader Popular Front (in the second half of the 1930s), and the Fatherland Front (during World War II). Georgi Dimitrov, the conceiver of all these fronts, retrospectively depicts them as successive links in an unremitting anti-fascist struggle, crowned by the victory of September 9, 1944.⁹⁸ There is thus nothing accidental or external in the communist takeover of power, which seems conditioned by the entire preceding (prewar) development, which pushed forward with “historical necessity” and inevitability toward such an outcome.

The anti-fascist struggle is the subject of several discussions in Bulgarian historical scholarship. The first one in 1969 discussed the “left sectarian” deviation of the Bulgarian Communist Party after the September Uprising of 1923. The issue here was whether the communist course toward an armed uprising (a course imposed by the Comintern) after the September defeat was correct or not. According to the main speaker,

⁹⁷ Vŭlko Chervenkov, “Dvata septemvri” (The two Septembers). In Georgi Dimitrov, Vasil Kolarov, and Vŭlko Chervenkov, *Septemvriiskoto vustanie, 1923–1953* (The September Uprising, 1923–1953) (Sofia: Izdatelstvo na BKP, 1953), 105–109, citation on 106 (from *Rabotnichesko delo*, no. 313, September 22, 1945). The connection between the two uprisings was first asserted by Georgi Dimitrov, who said that the anti-fascist uprising of 1923 failed, but it dug a chasm between the people and fascism, the laboring masses, and the capitalist bourgeoisie, which determined subsequent struggles until the victory on September 9, 1944. See Georgi Dimitrov, “Otechestveniyat front, negovoto razvitie i predstoyashite zadachi. Doklad pred Vtoriya kongres na Otechestveniya front, 2 fevruari 1948 g.” (The Fatherland Front, its development, and the forthcoming tasks. Report before the Second Congress of the Fatherland Front, February 2, 1948). In Georgi Dimitrov, *Sŭchineniya* (Works), vol. 13 (Sofia: Izdatelstvo na BKP, 1955), 447–508, esp. 463–464.

⁹⁸ Georgi Dimitrov, “Otechestveniyat front,” 463–464.

Lyubomir Panayotov, the course was correct as long as the “revolutionary situation” lasted (dated until September 1924), but afterwards it became untenable. Conversely, the co-speaker Dimităr Kosev maintained that the course was incorrect right from the defeat in September 1923 and that there was no revolutionary situation, but rather a retreat from the revolutionary struggle.

The gist of the debate (which has little to do with the facts) transpires from the concluding speech of L. Panayotov, who accused Kosev of belittling the successes of the party after the September Uprising and of implying that “the mass struggles against fascism were on the wane, or if there were such struggles, they were not sufficient to justify the course towards an armed uprising.”⁹⁹ There follows empty praise of the Bulgarian Communist Party’s successes in this period and the conclusion that, were the course not correct, these successes would not have been possible either—a graphic example of a “deductive” approach from ideological thesis to (invented) facts. Thus the stake is the incessant (if not growing) anti-fascist struggle and the Communist Party’s successes in it. The irony is that precisely this course culminated in the bombing of the Sveta Nedelya Church by the military unit of the Communist Party on April 16, 1925—the biggest terrorist act in interwar Europe. The king barely escaped, but the blast killed over 200 people (among them a number of generals and members of parliament). In the aftermath there was a severe repression of communist and other leftist forces that almost wiped them out (and led to the communists’ political change of course, subsequently dubbed a “left sectarian” deviation).

The culmination of the anti-fascist struggle was the armed resistance during World War II. The Communist Party’s strategy and tactics during the war were the subject of a special discussion at the Institute of History of the Bulgarian Communist Party in 1973 (mentioned previously in connection with Bulgaria’s status during the war). The strategy consisted of the following interrelated points. First, the struggle for socialism should not be put forward as an immediate goal (but kept in mind as final “strategic” goal) while the struggle for democracy should be put forward instead. Second, the main blow should be directed against fascism, both German Nazism and Bulgarian monarcho-fascism; hence, there should be mobilization of all anti-fascist (and anti-German) and democratic forces, including those leaning to the right. Third, the struggle should be presented as dictated by the

⁹⁹ “Kursūt kŭm vŭorŭzheno vŭstanie sled Septemvriiskoto vŭstanie” (The course towards an armed uprising after the September Uprising), *Izvestiya na Instituta po istoriya na BKP*, vol. 20 (Sofia, 1969), 392–439, esp. 439.

national interests and even for national salvation and liberation from German domination with the support of the Soviet Union (the prospective liberator).¹⁰⁰

The interesting point here is that the transformation in the position of the Bulgarian Communist Party is revealed very clearly and distinctly precisely by orthodox communist authors who identified themselves completely with communism and naïvely assumed that all others were bound to think the same way. Thus for Gornenski, in the struggle against the monarcho-fascist dictatorship the forces of the proletariat led by the Communist Party alone did not suffice, and it was necessary to join the poor and middle peasants and the petty and middle bourgeoisie. To that purpose a goal had to be held up that would be acceptable and attractive to the broadest masses. Thus the party was right to put forward the prospect of national independence and a democratic rule.¹⁰¹ In other words, the struggle against fascism for national independence and democracy veiled the struggle for communism so that the latter could be made more attractive and popular.

The strategy itself was worked out gradually. Initially the Bulgarian communists were confused by the German-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact and the Soviet directive to interpret Germany's war against the Western democracies as a war between two imperialist blocs. But after the attack on the Soviet Union, the party line changed swiftly and flexibly. Thus the Communist Party took up (and, after the victory, monopolized) the role of anti-fascist and democratic force plus the role of patriotic and nationally responsible factor. Just recall that, during the interwar period, the supporters of the established order considered the Communist Party not only subversive to the state, but also treacherous to the nation (an instrument of a dreaded state). Thus it was the struggle against fascism during the war that came to legitimize and give a new appeal to communism in Bulgaria (and in Europe).¹⁰²

¹⁰⁰ Stoyan Petrov, "Politicheskata liniya na BRP v godinite na vŭorŭzhenata borba (yuni 1941 – septemvri 1944 g.)" (The political line of the Bulgarian Workers' Party in the years of the armed struggle, June 1941–September 1944), *Isvestiya na Instituta po istoriya na BKP*, vol. 29 (Sofia: Partizdat, 1973), 306–319; Asparukh Avramov, "Politicheskata strategiya i taktika na BRP po vreme na Vtorata svetovna voyna (septemvri 1939 – septemvri 1944 g.)" (The political strategy and tactics of the Bulgarian Workers' Party during World War II, September 1939–September 1944), *Isvestiya na Instituta po istoriya na BKP*, vol. 29, (Sofia: Partizdat, 1973), 322–341.

¹⁰¹ Nikifor Gornenski, *Vŭorŭzhenata borba 1941–1944*, 48–49, 85; Nikifor Gornenski, "Vŭorŭzhenata borba na bŭlgarskiya," in *Sotsialisticheskata revolyutsiya*, 151.

¹⁰² See on this issue François Furet, *The Passing of an Illusion: The Idea of Communism in the Twentieth Century* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1999) (origi-

In fact, the resistance against the pro-German course of Bulgarian politics did not come from the communists, either alone or with other leftist forces (especially the Agrarian Party). Ilcho Dimitrov was the one who directed attention to and treated at length the legal opposition of bourgeois non-fascist parties with a pro-Western orientation (with the characteristic terminological and other compromises).¹⁰³ This was the “third political force” in the country, alongside (the ruling) fascism and the leftist forces within the Fatherland Front. Though Dimitrov does not refer to it as such, this is pro-Western, non-violent anti-fascism. The very fact that interest and attention were turned toward the bourgeois opposition provoked the reaction of the hard-liners in the previously mentioned discussion “On the Bourgeois Opposition and the Character of Muraviev’s Cabinet.” The characteristic critiques in this discussion (especially of the main speaker Petūr Avramov) are that Dimitrov greatly narrows the social base of the Fatherland Front and of the resistance in general, and that he unjustifiably reclassifies segments of the working people as part of the bourgeois camp.¹⁰⁴

Let us also direct attention to the fact that (due to ideological censorship) the bourgeois parties can be non-fascist at the most, but not anti-fascist. Anti-fascists were only the communists and their allies from the Fatherland Front, with whom they concluded an agreement for “union of action” (*edinodeistvie*) and who therefore passed to the “positions of the anti-fascist resistance.” This is explicitly stated in the official *History of the Anti-fascist Struggle*.¹⁰⁵ In short, there cannot be such a thing as bourgeois pro-Western anti-fascism.

A more attentive glance at the “fascist camp” led to the differentiation of various forces. The ruling circles (of “monarcho-fascism”) were more moderate in their pro-German policies, despite the presence among them of pronounced fascists such as Bogdan Filov and Gabrovski. They tried to minimize the demands on Bulgaria and left a “door open” for an exit from

nally published as *Le passé d'une illusion: essai sur l'idée communiste au XXe siècle*. [Paris: Editions Robert Laffont, 1995], esp. 1, 17, 24.

¹⁰³ Ilcho Dimitrov, *Burzhoaznata opozitsiya*; Ilcho Dimitrov, “Bŭlgarskata demokraticzna obshtestvenost.”

¹⁰⁴ “Za burzhoaznata opozitsiya i haraktera,” 165–354. The discussion is reprinted in Ilcho Dimitrov, *Burzhoaznata opozitsiya 1939–1944* (Sofia: Hristo Botev, 1997). About the contemporary situation, see the introduction and Dimitrov’s memoirs: Ilcho Dimitrov, *Vsichko teche*, 120–121.

¹⁰⁵ *Istoriya na antifashistkata*, vol. 1, 45–46. Ilcho Dimitrov (see footnote 103) also speaks of non-fascist, but not anti-fascist, bourgeois parties of the legal opposition.

the Axis (contacts with the bourgeois opposition, with Great Britain and the United States, and diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union). Outside the government there remained an “opposition” of extreme fascist forces (the fascist “ultra”), which favored total fascization of the state and was willing to make all sorts of concessions and new commitments to Germany and follow it to the bitter end.¹⁰⁶ Here as well, one can see a change in the earlier uniform treatment of the fascist camp; before, all were equally bad, but now some are worse than others.

Especially important is the issue of the scale and the strength of the Bulgarian partisan movement and of the resistance in general, which included people in the underground as well as forms of unarmed resistance such as industrial sabotage and hiding of foodstuffs. This has a purely factual aspect of “historical truth,” such as the scale and effectiveness of the resistance, how it developed over time, the force of the repressions, and the participation of the partisans in the power takeover. During the communist period the greatly exaggerated figures of about 200,000 participants in the resistance and approximately 30,000 people killed (partisans and their supporters—*yatatsi*) were sometimes cited.¹⁰⁷ In fact, the reliable data painstakingly collected by the regime itself shows 5,639 victims of the regimes from June 9, 1923, to September 9, 1944, of whom 2,740 were killed in 1941–1944, i.e., during the resistance.¹⁰⁸

As for the scale of the armed resistance, there were 6,900 partisans on the eve of September 9, 1944 (almost half of them went into the mountains in August and September). If we add 2,740 people killed (partisans and their supporters) in 1941–1944, we come to the figure of 9,640 parti-

¹⁰⁶ Such differentiation in Ilcho Dimitrov, “Profesor Bogdan Filov,” 120–122.

¹⁰⁷ Examples of exaggerations: L.B. Valev, *Bolgarskii narod*, 339. The figure 30,000 partisans (and supporters) killed is cited. The same figure appears in Voin Bozhinov, “Borbata na bŭlgarskiya,” 15. Same in Nikifor Gornenski, “Vŭorŭzhenata borba.” In *Sotsialisticheskata revolyutsiya*, 173. See also *Istoriya na bŭlgarskata komunisticheska partiya* (History of the Bulgarian Communist Party) (Sofia: Partizdat, 1984), 431 (9,000 partisans and over 20,000 supporters killed).

¹⁰⁸ The data was collected by the Museum of the Revolutionary Movement and summarized by Magdalena Basmadzhieva, “Te zagainakha za pobedata na velikoto komunisticheskoto delo. Prouchvane, klasov i partien analiz na zaginalite bortsii protiv fashizma 1923–1944 g.” (They died for the victory of the great communist cause. Research, class, and party analysis of the fallen combatants against fascism, 1923–1944). In *Pobeda 1941–1944* (Victory, 1941–1944). *Godishnik na muzeya na revolyutsionното dvizhenie v Bŭlgariya* (Sofia, 1969), 138–173. This is the most authoritative source on the issue.

sans (in the old territories, i.e., prewar Bulgaria). They had about 27,000–30,000 supporters in 1941–1944.¹⁰⁹ The well-documented book by the writer Orlin Vasilev gives a good idea of the regime's brutalities in fighting the partisans and their supporters.¹¹⁰ Characteristic of the Bulgarian case is that (in contrast to Yugoslavia and Greece) the armed resistance came predominantly (eighty percent) from the Communist Party. Among other things, this attests to the communists' difficulties in broadening the resistance beyond their ranks (as came up coyly in the debates). Still, one can encounter absurd claims, for instance that the struggle of the communist-led anti-fascist forces engaged the 300,000-strong Bulgarian army and the whole state machine and prevented the sending of any Bulgarian soldiers to the Eastern Front.¹¹¹

The facts "speak" for one thing or another only when they are made to, in other words, when the historian interprets them thus. The above-mentioned facts—once established—are subject to evaluation: the number of partisans and how it changed over time, the kinds of activities they were engaged in, the extent to which the resistance was infiltrated by police agents, and so on.¹¹² The evaluation may emphasize awkward features (after 1989), such as the close surveillance and manipulation of the communists by the police under the experienced Nikola Geshev, and many "internal failures" (which, after the victory, created the hushed-up problem with the police files of communist functionaries¹¹³); and a sud-

¹⁰⁹ Doncho Daskalov, *Politicheskite ubiistva v novata istoriya na Bŭlgariya* (Political Assassinations in the modern history of Bulgaria) (Sofia: Dr. Petŭr Beron, 1999), 169–170, 196–197. The data (and other data) is from the police administration (Direktsiya na politsiyata) and the military courts in the Ministry of War.

¹¹⁰ Orlin Vasilev, *Vŭorŭzhenata sŭprotiva 1923/1944* (The armed resistance 1923/1944). (Sofia: Izdanie na BRP (k.), 1946), esp. 170–185, 606–633 on the torture and murders of partisans and supporters.

¹¹¹ Donko Dochev, *Monarkhofashizmŭt sreshtu narodnata*, 199; Evgenii Kamenov, "Harakterni cherti," 14; Nikifor Gornenski, "Vŭorŭzhenata borba," in *Sotsialisticheskata revolyutsiya*, 177.

¹¹² Data on this issue from the archives of the Ministry of the Interior in Momchil Metodiev, *Mashina za legitimnost. Rolyata na Dŭrzhavna sigurnost v komunisticheskata dŭrzhava* (Legitimation machine. The role of State Security in the communist state) (Sofia: Institut za izsledvane na blizkoto minalo, Institut "Otvoreno obshtestvo," Ciela, 2008), 61–62. The People's Court revealed 184 secret agents of the police among the Communist Party, and another 290 were revealed by the investigation of police archives by the state security in 1951–1955.

¹¹³ Data and speculations on that issue in Kostadin Chakŭrov, *Vtoriyat etazh* (The second floor) (Sofia, 1990), 19–50.

den upsurge in the number of partisans with the approach of the Soviet army shortly before September 9, 1944. The data is also subject to comparative evaluation. Thus the resistance in Bulgaria was much weaker than in occupied Yugoslavia and Greece, but stronger than in other German allies, namely Romania and Hungary, where it was virtually nonexistent.

Finally, the facts and data are situated in a broader interpretative framework, which sometimes strongly departs from them, but nevertheless prepares the ground for their reception. Under communism, what dominated was a strongly heroic, unabashedly distorted account of a mass popular anti-fascist resistance under the guidance of the Communist Party. For the adherents of the occupation thesis, the resistance was directed against the Nazi occupiers (hence for liberation and national independence) and against their Bulgarian fascist supporters (hence it had a class character, against the bourgeoisie and capitalism); it was conducted in the German "rear" and even opened up an "internal front"; it also presented a manifestation of the "Bulgarian-Soviet combat friendship"; finally, it was a "sector of the enormous united front of the freedom-loving nations, which led a bloody struggle against German fascism with the Soviet Union in the lead."¹¹⁴ With the shattering and rejection of the occupation thesis, the resistance (somewhat less grandiose) is directed more "immediately" against Bulgarian fascism and the bourgeois establishment and thus mediated against German Nazism (whose "tentacles" were the Bulgarian fascists); here as well, the anti-fascist struggle in Bulgaria is an "inseparable part of the united anti-fascist resistance of the European nations."¹¹⁵ In a somewhat different frame, the resistance is seen as a manifestation of social (class) struggle growing into a "civil war," which pitted one segment of Bulgarian society against another.¹¹⁶

Of course, from the standpoint of the "fascist" regime at the time, the resistance engaged in subversive and terrorist activities, inspired by a for-

¹¹⁴ Nikifor Gornenski, *Vŭorŭzhenata borba*, 61, 313, 318 (citation); Nikifor Gornenski, "Vŭorŭzhenata borba," in *The Socialist Revolution*, 177.

¹¹⁵ *Istoriya na antifashistkata*, vol. 1, 33–34, 41, 44 (citation).

¹¹⁶ The interpretation of the anti-fascist struggle as primarily a class struggle that intensified into a civil war against the fascist bourgeois government connects logically with the thesis of September 9 as the beginning of a socialist revolution (a subject to be tackled in the next essay). The civil war thesis was officially endorsed by Todor Zhivkov in a speech on the occasion of the Day of Victory (May 9). See Todor Zhivkov, *Izbrani sŭchineniya* (Selected works), vol. 23 (Sofia: Partizdat, 1976), 255–256.

eign state, against legitimate Bulgarian state authorities.¹¹⁷ As will be seen, after the fall of communism this general framework was reproduced and gained in plausibility, but it coexists and competes with a modest version of anti-fascism.

It is worth noting that the works on the anti-fascist struggle end with September 9, 1944, and do not include the participation of the Bulgarian regular army (within the Third Ukrainian Front) in combat operations against German troops in Yugoslavia and Hungary, resulting in 32,000 Bulgarian casualties.¹¹⁸ Thus anti-fascism is characteristically reduced to the partisans, in which the contribution is significantly smaller, but “one’s own,” that is, of the Communist Party. The Bulgarian participation in the war was demanded by the Soviet Union and was justified at the time and later as necessary for gaining credit with the Allies. However, the Western allies understandably supported Yugoslavia and Greece (which had much stronger partisan movements and a greater contribution) and refused to recognize Bulgaria as a participant in the war on their side. The war and the casualties thus did not help satisfy Bulgarian claims, and the peace treaty is defined even by communist authors as the “only one possible” or “the most favorable under the circumstances.”¹¹⁹ After 1989 Vitka Toshova published a collection of documents attesting not only to the Western allies’ reluctance to recognize Bulgaria’s war effort, but also to the Soviets’ complicity in such an arrangement (contrary to what was previously affirmed).¹²⁰

¹¹⁷ This interpretation also in Stefan Gruev, *Korona ot trŭni. Tsaruvaneto na Boris III, 1918–1943* (Crown of thorns. The reign of Boris III, 1918–1943) (Sofia: Bŭlgarski pisatel, 1991), 404–406 (originally published as Stephane Groueff, *Crown of Thorns* [Lanham, NY: Madison Books, 1987]).

¹¹⁸ Thus *History of the Anti-fascist Struggle* ends with the power takeover on September 9, 1944. It is also stated there that the anti-fascist struggle ended on September 9, 1944 (vol. 1, 47, 50).

¹¹⁹ Voin Bozhinov, *Zashtita na natsionalnata nezavisimost na Bŭlgariya 1944–1947* (Defense of the national independence of Bulgaria) (Sofia: Izdatelstvo na BAN, 1962), esp. 157–159, 214. Also *Kratka istoriya na Otechestvenata voina* (Short history of the Fatherland War) (Sofia: Dŭrzhavno voenno izdatelstvo, 1958), 294. From the foreign authors, see Nissan Oren, *Revolution Administered: Agrarianism and Communism in Bulgaria* (Baltimore and London, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973), 86–87.

¹²⁰ Vitka Toshkova et al., eds., *Bŭlgariya. Nepriznatiyat protivnik na Tretiya Raikh. Dokumenti* (Bulgaria. The unrecognized opponent of the Third Reich. Documents) (Sofia: Izdatelstvo na MO “Sv. Georgi Pobedonosets,” 1995), 7–8 (introduction by Vitka Toshkova).

The victory legitimated communism more than anything else, and the Communist Party's ascendance to power and establishment of a totalitarian regime guaranteed the party's monopoly over the "truth" about the past. The anti-fascist struggle became the privileged subject of a great many historical studies, as well as numerous memoirs by partisans and supporters, whose heroic titles speak for themselves.¹²¹ The message of this literature of epic struggles, heroic combatants, and great feats, is clear and simple—the extraordinary and exclusive role of the Bulgarian Communist Party in the victory over fascism. An endless reservoir of merits was thus being compiled for posterity. The early "charismatic" (heroic) stage of struggle became a justification for staying in power and claiming an unending rule over the country.

In the initial period of consolidation of communist rule, the political opposition was easily and indiscriminately labeled "fascist," while the anti-fascist, democratic forces were reduced to the parties in the Fatherland Front. The enumeration in a single phrase of "anti-fascist, democratic, popular, progressive, patriotic forces" under communist guidance in so many speeches and writings created the false impression that the span of these entities coincided: anti-fascists = democrats = patriots = communists. It could be said that, while during the war the communist strategy consisted of broadening the designation "anti-fascist" to include other forces, now the reverse strategy was applied, and the notion was restricted to mean communists alone. The communists established a monopoly over anti-fascism: no anti-fascism but the communist one. Hence the even more suggestive and fateful implication in negative terms: that non-communists and anti-communists are not democrats, not patriots, but reactionaries, and—still worse—suspected fascists.¹²² Thus the repression of the communists' opponents was easily and effectively justified.

As well attested to in Vesela Chichovska's empirical study on the transformation of the educational system after September 9, the term fascist ("defascization") was used by the communist leaders most indiscriminately and falsely (as to meaning), but otherwise entirely deliberately and purposefully (as to referent) to eliminate their rivals and enemies and all

¹²¹ An incomplete list of books on the "the struggle against fascism" theme in the catalogue of the St. Cyril and Methodius National Library includes some 130 titles in Bulgarian and dozens in other languages.

¹²² Among the many examples: Georgi Dimitrov, *Za Edinniya, Narodniya i Otechestveniya front* (On the United, Popular, and Fatherland Front) (Sofia: Izdatelstvo na OF, 1982), 670, 751. In this sense, see François Furet, *The Passing of an Illusion*, 209–265, esp. 223–225.

opposition or independent thinking. The manipulative usage of “fascism” thus extended to categories such as “Greater Bulgaria chauvinist,” “fascist by office” (i.e., those holding office in the supposedly fascized state apparatus), “concealed fascist” (everyone who was at odds with communist politics) and even “unproven anti-fascist” (in a regulation envisioning punishment for teachers of “unproven anti-fascist activities”).¹²³ The qualification “concealed fascist” in particular was applied to previous allies from the Fatherland Front, such as the social democrats Krūstyu Pastukhov and Kosta Lulchev and the independent intellectual and lawyer Petko Stoyanov. Even the Agrarian leader and resolute opponent of fascism Nikola Petkov was accused in the show trial against him, among other things, of fascism, or as Georgi Dimitrov put it more “cautiously,” that he “aimed to clear the way for the restoration of fascism.”¹²⁴

Moreover, former fascists could be pardoned if they had subsequently “corrected” themselves, but former anti-fascists could not be pardoned if they had recently taken a stand against the communists. With the consolidation of the communist dictatorship, being “anti-communist” became even more incriminating than being “fascist.” Tsola Dragoicheva (a long-term Politburo member) was very outspoken in her statement that “under today’s conditions” (two years after September 9, 1944), a person “with anti-fascist credentials” in the past who later turned against the Communist Party was much more dangerous than someone who had been a fascist before September 9, but might have changed afterwards to support the new regime.¹²⁵

Anti-fascism outlived fascism by decades. Ironically, the anti-fascist resistance in Bulgaria grew stronger after the destruction of fascism, admitting (after official procedures of recognition of merits) an increased number of combatants, an army of tens of thousands. These so-called “active fighters against fascism and capitalism” were identified according to (often fabricated) merits and classified in categories beyond the initial partisans, their “hidlers” (*yatatsi*) and “helpers” (*pomagachi*). By provid-

¹²³ Vesela Chichovska, *Politikata sreshtu prosvetnata traditsiya* (Politics against educational tradition) (Sofia: Universitetsko izdatelstvo “Sv. Kliment Okhridski,” 1995), esp. 35, 49, 60, 62, 67, 68–70, 74, 102–128, 291–292, 316–322, 417–418.

¹²⁴ See Georgi Dimitrov’s notes on the interview with Western journalists concerning the death sentence of Nikola Petkov in Georgi Dimitrov, *Dnevnik, 9 mart 1933 – 6 fevruari 1949* (Diary, March 9, 1933–February 6, 1949). Eds. Dimităr Sirkov, Petko Boev, Nikola Avreiski, and Ekaterina Kabakchieva (Sofia: Universitetsko izdatelstvo “Sv. Kliment Okhridski,” 1997), 575–577.

¹²⁵ Quoted from Vesela Chichovska, *Politikata sreshtu*, 418.

ing them and their children with advantages and careers, the communist regime created for itself a loyal anti-fascist meritocracy.

It is not difficult to see why the thesis of a former “fascist regime” remained firmly in place until the end of communist rule—with so much anti-fascism, a lot of fascism was needed as well (reversing the causation). The anti-fascist struggle and the victory over a force as odious and discredited as fascism was part and parcel of the legitimacy of the communist regime in Bulgaria and elsewhere, that is, of its claim to rule indefinitely and without term and mandate. The anti-fascist origins of the new regime were even fixed in the first Bulgarian communist constitution of 1947 (Article 1)—truly a foundation myth.¹²⁶ In the absence of a liberal democratic (legal-procedural) justification by periodic elections (those held being a farce), the communist authorities grounded their legitimacy in the self-appointed mission to bring about the “bright future” of communism, but also in past merits, the heroic anti-fascist struggle in particular. It is from the anti-fascist struggles, inflated and heroically idealized, that the Bulgarian communist elite derived its charismatic origins, constantly evoked in order to conceal the ongoing bureaucratic transformation, the compromising of ideals, and the sheer grip on power.¹²⁷

¹²⁶ Konstitutsiya na Narodna republika Bŭlgariya ot 1947 g. (Constitution of the People's Republic of Bulgaria from 1947). Art. 1. “Bulgaria is a People's Republic with representative government created and consolidated as a result of the heroic struggles of the Bulgarian people against the monarcho-fascist dictatorship and of the victorious popular uprising on September 9, 1944.” in *Bŭlgarski konstitutsionni proekti* (Bulgarian constitutional projects), ed. Veselin Metodiev and Lŭchezar Stoyanov (Sofia: Dr. Petŭr Beron, 1990), 37–38.

¹²⁷ In Max Weber's typology, a mission is characteristic of the charismatic domination whose legitimacy lies within itself, not in tradition or legal procedures. With the inevitable transformation of charisma over time (along one of the possible lines), the rule becomes bureaucratic, the “comrades” from the heroic period become office holders, the teaching is frozen into a dogma, and the mission is transformed into “once acquired rights.” See Max Weber, *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1980), 140–147, 654–679. Also Roumen Daskalov, *Vŭvedenie v sotsiologiyata na Max Weber* (Introduction to the sociology of Max Weber) (Sofia: Universitetsko izdatelstvo “Sv. Kliment Okhridski,” 1992), 168–174. Hence the importance of past merits from the “heroic period” for a regime with such charismatic origins as the communist regime.

After Communism

With communism's collapse and radical delegitimation, the issue of Bulgarian fascism was also subject to contestation and debate. Initially it was strongly politicized and became the object of embittered public debates having little to do with detached scholarly treatment. On the one hand, the communists, now under attack, labeled their opponents in the customary way as fascists (or neo-Nazis), and it was rightly noted that some reverted to calling themselves anti-fascists rather than communists. On the other hand, articles and books appeared that denied the existence of fascism in Bulgaria—a false general statement. Debates that asked “Was there fascism in Bulgaria?” were misleading in posing a question that suggested a simple—and wrong—answer.¹²⁸ A certain “revanchism” appeared in the guise of historical scholarship as well, especially in the rehabilitation of right-wing and outright fascist organizations. Characteristic of such scholarship is a simplistic undifferentiated approach and unconcealed biases, practically a mirror image of those in early communist publications.¹²⁹ Of course, the real stake in this type of debate was not the scholarly one, but the vindication of people once persecuted for “fascist activities” and the contestation of communism in general; more often than not they were rooted in biographical experience on one or the other side of the barricade. Yet these discussions were a weak echo of a past that had grown distant as generations passed and circumstances changed. The discussions cannot be compared with the dramatic ideological and political clashes after September 9, 1944, when the overblown term “fascist” was used as a justification for repressions against opponents of the new order and against recalcitrant people in general. The political confrontation (“polarization”) after 1989, though sharp, remained merely verbal, and the trend was toward liberal democracy and away from totalitarianism.

¹²⁸ “Imalo li e fashizŭm u nas?” (Has there been fascism in our country?) *Literaturno forum*, no. 27, June 5, 1990; no. 37, September 13, 1990; no. 42, October 18, 1990. See also the publication of Milcho Spasov, “Imalo li e fashizŭm v Bŭlgariya?” (Has there been fascism in Bulgaria?), *Demokratiya*, no. 13, February 28, 1990; Milcho Spasov, *Imalo li e fashizŭm v Bŭlgariya? Izbrana publitsistika* (Has there been fascism in Bulgaria? Selected essays) (Sofia, 1999).

¹²⁹ Nikola Altŭnkov, *Narekokha gi fashisti. Legioneri, otetspaisievtsi, brannitsi, rodozashtitnitsi, kubratisti* (They called them fascists. Legionaries, Warriors, Fatherland Defenders, Kubratists) (Sofia, 2004), esp. 466–469, 491–495; Petŭr Konstantinov, *Istoriya na Bŭlgariya s nyakoi premŭlchavani dosega istoricheski fakti 681–1996* (History of Bulgaria with some previously unmentioned facts) (Sofia: Karina M, 1997), 229–230, 237–240.

The “rewriting of history” after the fall of communism and its ideological censorship can be described most generally as a “normalization” of the historical narrative toward a “legitivist” (“old regime”) pro-state position by eliminating the communist (revolutionary-“extremist”) perspective on the events. It was already present in outline before 1989, but only as partial “revisions” of certain points in specialized empirical studies, carefully worded so as not to confront directly the regime’s main taboos. As the overall framework changed, old facts were presented in a new light and new facts were included or emphasized, some of which were known to the specialists at the time, but passed over in silence. Now clear distinctions are made between fascist ideology, a fascist movement (organizations, parties), a fascist regime, and fascization of the state system. Fascism did not attain power in Bulgaria, hence there was no fascist regime or ruling fascism. There were instead a series of authoritarian regimes with different levels of authoritarianism, and which eventually had a certain degree of fascization. But there was a plethora of right-wing and fascist formations that had to adapt to the existing order and live in “symbiosis” with it, somewhat deprived of individuality. At the same time it is pointed out that neither authoritarianism nor the extreme right are divided by a “Chinese wall” from fascism.¹³⁰

Beyond Bulgarian historians’ general agreement today on the authoritarian tendency of the interwar epoch, there are differences in how individual governments are characterized and assessed. According to Migeв, the process of fascization began on June 9, 1923, and proceeded without interruption, though its manifestations and intensity varied. The rule of the People’s Bloc (the former “breach of fascism”) thus falls within the framework of authoritarianism. The process of fascization reached a higher stage after May 19, 1934, without, however, forming a fascist totalitarian system; the authoritarianism was softened during the parliamentary model of non-party governments formed in 1938–1939, when parliamentarism resumed on a non-party basis. The regime’s authoritarianism (and fascization) grew stronger with the government of Bogdan Filov and especially after Bulgaria joined the Axis on March 1, 1941.¹³¹

¹³⁰ Nikolai Poppetrov, *Avtoritarizŭm—fashizŭm*, 25–48, esp. 43, 46–47.

¹³¹ Vladimir Migeв, “Politicheskata sistema na Bŭlgariya ot 9 yuni 1923 g. do 9 septemvri 1944 g.” (The political system of Bulgaria from June 9, 1923 until September 9, 1944), *Istoricheski pregled* 46, no. 9 (1990): 77–89, esp. 83–85; Vladimir Migeв, “Avtoritarni i fashistki tendentsii v bŭlgarskoto obshtestvo mezhdu dvete svetovni vojni” (Authoritarian and fascist tendencies in Bulgarian society between the two world wars), in *Problemi na novata i nai-novata politicheska istoriya na Bŭlgariya* (Problems of the modern

Contrary to the usual way the question is posed, Krüstyū Manchev stresses the preservation of elements of bourgeois democracy throughout the period; thus (with a grain of salt) bourgeois democracy seems weakened and “interrupted” by authoritarianism, rather than the other way round. Until May 19, 1934, parliamentary democracy prevailed, and after that, dictatorship, but “just as democracy did not reach completion and never attained a classical form, so dictatorship in Bulgaria was not continuous and total,” while the coexistence between the two continued even in the years of World War II.¹³²

Stoicho Grūncharov is the author of a general and systematic treatment of political developments in the interwar period and during World War II, not without some polemical passages. Of interest here are the following assertions and assessments: the rule of the People’s Bloc (1931–1934) showed continuity (not a break) with the regime of the Democratic Concord (of Lyapchev) in strengthening the role of the state, though under political democracy; however, this was a “harsh democracy” that fought against the leftist forces in particular. The regime that took power on May 19, 1934, was a military dictatorship, but not fascist, and it could not become totalitarian; anti-Semitism and nationalism were absent from it; besides, there were many Freemasons in the government (Freemasonry was banned by the fascist regimes). The system created by King Boris III was a personal royal regime, resembling in essence the Bonapartist monarchies of the mid-nineteenth century, especially in their Prussian-German variant—“a Bonapartist authoritarian monarchy enriched by modern etatist techniques and doctrines.” The monarch appointed a government, and the National Assembly approved the budget; the political rights of the citizens were curtailed, but personal rights were strictly observed. In face of the German threat, there was no alternative to joining the Axis, though the king did not believe Germany would win the war. In the event of resistance, the Bulgarian army and people would have been massacred standing on the side of the powers that had forced upon Bulgaria the unjust Neuilly treaty and that supported Greece. Insofar as the Bulgarian state preserved the attributes of its statehood and part of its sovereignty,

and contemporary political history of Bulgaria), ed. Trendafil Mitev (Sofia, 1991), 228–253; Vladimir Migeв, “Po nyakoi problemi.”

¹³² Krüstyū Manchev, “Monarkhiyata i diktaturata v Būlgariya, 1934–1944” (The monarchy and the dictatorship in Bulgaria, 1934–1944), in *681–1948. Iz istoriyata na būlgarskata narodnost i dūrzhava* (681–1948. From the history of the Bulgarian people and state) (Sofia: Pelikan Alfa, 1993), 265–283, citation on 280–281.

Grüncharov considers the armed resistance illegal, especially as it was directed from outside and in the interest of a foreign state (and not against German troops). The Soviet Union's declaration of war on Bulgaria had no military strategic justification and meant occupation. The participation of the Bulgarian army in the war against the Germans and the casualties did not avert the new catastrophe, presented in communist historiography as a "victorious revolution."¹³³ One can see how the new "inverse" perspective transforms the picture of the "facts."

The regime during Bogdan Filov's premiership and throughout the war received a more adequate treatment. According to Nikolai Poppetrov, this was an authoritarian dictatorship of the king ("royal dictatorship"), which after 1939 became increasingly saturated with fascist elements ("fascized"), mostly on the German model. Poppetrov points to the following fascist features in the state institutions and the regime's ideological legitimation. First, there was the control and regulation of the economic, social, and cultural spheres through new professional organizations under state control: a state youth organization ("Brannik"), an institution for propaganda and guidance of culture ("Directorate of the National Propaganda," later "Chamber of Culture"), and forms of shaping leisure and recreation (the movement "Work and Joy"). The second such feature was the introduction of racial (especially anti-Semitic) and political restrictions: the law for protection of the nation and the law of civil mobilization. The third one was to create a national ideology, sharply nationalist and anti-liberal, with some fascist ideas; it was imposed as official and mandatory and used for fighting political enemies. The fourth element was when Bulgaria joined Europe's "New Order" in opposition to communism, "demo-liberalism," "Judeo-Masonry," and "plutocracy," and the fight against communism and the partisans was especially severe. There were also manifestly fascist organizations outside the government, which had a place in public life and were quite active in their propaganda. On the other hand (in contrast to the fascist regimes), a monopolistic mass fascist party was absent in Bulgaria, and the regime was not monolithic (some intellectual and political pluralism existed); the Führer principle was not elaborated (King Boris III was not a Führer in spite of his

¹³³ Ivan Bozhilov, Vera Mutafchieva, Konstantin Kosev, Andrei Pantev, and Stoicho Grüncharov, *Istoriya na Bŭlgariya* (Sofia: Abagar, 1998), 371–499 (chapter by Stoicho Grüncharov), esp. 431–433, 446–447, 459–460, 474, 480–481, 484, 497–499, citation on 460. See also the part by Stoicho Grüncharov in Elena Statelova and Stoicho Grüncharov, *Istoriya na nova Bŭlgariya 1878–1944* (History of modern Bulgaria, 1878–1944) (Sofia: Anubis, 1999), esp. 526–527, 551, 567–569, 606, 631–633.

cult); political and ideological control over the society were far from total; militarization was not excessive; and anti-Semitism and xenophobia did not become a major element of state politics. Fascism is treated here as a variety of totalitarianism: it “strives” toward totalitarianism, which remains underdeveloped.¹³⁴ As can be seen in this treatment by a specialist, now the message is the opposite (and against the current): not to underestimate the fascist elements of the wartime regime.

After 1989 the influential historian Ilcho Dimitrov modified his views about the regime during the war. In new editions of his books he substituted “authoritarian” for “monarcho-fascist” regime.¹³⁵ The possibility of such a “mechanical” change shows the serious character of his works. In another work Dimitrov offers a new definition of the regime (which its theoreticians called “national democracy”), namely: “an authoritarian state with the monarch as supreme authority, without organized political support, and with the use of some elected institutions.” Furthermore, he says, “its main principles were the elimination of parties (*bezpartiinost*) and of the strict separation of the executive from the legislative.” The dictatorship was legalized with the restoration of the National Assembly (with severely restricted powers) and assumed the form of a non-party rule under the supreme guidance of the king.¹³⁶

The reappraisal of Bagryanov’s about-face policy is taken up again by Ilcho Dimitrov in his reworked book about this politician. Dimitrov reveals the (previously not mentioned, or misrepresented) initial support of the Soviet Union and the Bulgarian communists for his government and his politics. The delay and the subsequent failure of his politics is attributed to his attempt to ignore the Soviet Union, the refusal of the Western allies to recognize Bulgarian territorial acquisitions, the unfulfilled hopes for frictions between the Allies, the fear of Germany (given the occupation of Hungary), the abrupt Soviet advance, and the division of the Balkans into zones of influence, which weakened the bargaining position of the Bulgarian authorities.¹³⁷ Among Bagryanov’s achievements Dimitrov

¹³⁴ Nikolai Poppetrov, “Teoriyata za totalitarizma i bŭlgarskiyat fashizm” (The theory of totalitarianism and Bulgarian fascism), *Novo vreme* 67, no. 3 (1992): 38–46.

¹³⁵ In the last editions of *Burzhoaznata opozitsiya 1939–1944* (from 1997) and of *Bŭlgarskata demokratichna obshtestvenost, fashizmŭt i voinata 1934–1939* (from 2000), Dimitrov speaks of an authoritarian regime or royal dictatorship.

¹³⁶ Ilcho Dimitrov, *Ivan Bagryanov. Tsaredvoretz, politik, dŭrzhavnik* (Ivan Bagryanov. Courtier, politician, statesman) (Sofia: Akademichno izdatelstvo “Prof. Marin Drinov,” 1995), 22–23.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 52–89.

mentions the withdrawal of German troops from Bulgaria without combat or destruction, and among his faults Dimitrov cites the continued persecution of anti-fascists.¹³⁸ Dimitrov casts doubt on the guilt of Bagryanov, sentenced by the communist People's Court and shot. In an act of empathy, he states that Bulgarian statesmen like Bagryanov "who have taken upon themselves the burden of historical responsibility in tragic and crucial epochs" have acted so not out of personal motives of glory or gain, but "with responsibility and a sense of duty before the nation and the state"; how they fulfilled this duty "depended not on their good will, but on their personal qualities and the possibilities often not in the control of a small nation." Just as in 1941, in 1944 the fate of Bulgaria was sealed not by the deeds of its leadership or the qualities of its people, but by outside circumstances.¹³⁹ Toward the end of his life—with the experience of the fall of communism—Dimitrov increasingly stressed the limited sovereignty of a small state, the hopelessness of resistance to a great power, and the "insurmountable external factor" (the subordination of Bulgaria first to Germany and then to the Soviet Union). He also repeatedly pointed to the indifference of the Western democracies to the Bulgarian nation since the interwar period.¹⁴⁰

The fall of communism witnessed an increased interest in the personality and the rule of King Boris III. The book *Crown of Thorns* by the émigré Stéphane Groueff (son of the head of the king's private office, Petür Gruev) was translated into Bulgarian in 1991. It is written in a vivid and absorbing style (the author was once a reporter for *Paris Match*), with details from palace life and the king's relations with Bulgarian politicians, public figures, and military officers, as well as with foreign politicians and diplomats. There are interesting observations and opinions on his attitude toward Stamboliiski and the Agrarians, the communists and the Soviet Union, and Hitler. Groueff puts forward the hypothesis (supported by indirect evidence, and for that reason inconclusive) that, in his last meet-

¹³⁸ Ibid., 31, 45.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 87, 89.

¹⁴⁰ Ilcho Dimitrov, *Ivan Bagryanov*, 59, 72; Ilcho Dimitrov, "Profesor Bogdan Filov," 115, 117; Ilcho Dimitrov, "Deveti septemvri v bŭlgarskata istoriya" (September Ninth in Bulgarian history), in Ilcho Dimitrov, *Mezhdu München i Potsdam. Bŭlgarskata politika prez Vtorata svetovna voina. Istoricheski ocherti* (Between Munich and Potsdam. Bulgarian politics during World War II. Historical essays) (Sofia: Universitetsko izdatelstvo "Sv. Kliment Ohridski," 1998), 189–197, esp. 196; Ilcho Dimitrov, "Polovin vek po-kŭsno" (Half a century later), in Ilcho Dimitrov, *Mezhdu München i Potsdam*, 198–213, esp. 202–203.

ing with Hitler, the Bulgarian king held his own against the Führer's hysterical pressure to send troops to the Eastern Front.¹⁴¹

Beyond what was said on the system of rule established by the king and his own status therein, interest is now directed toward his character traits, psychology, and behavior. In contrast to his father Ferdinand I (whom he called "the monarch"), Boris III did not "dictate," avoided ostentation, and preferred to act flexibly and by the mediation of ministers, advisers, and others he trusted. Yet, contrary to some earlier opinions, he was not at all a weak and powerless personality,¹⁴² but possessed the will and strength of character necessary for his role, assumed responsibility when needed, and showed firmness, even if he preferred in some cases to put other persons or institutions in the foreground. It is enough to say that neither his ministers and advisers nor the foreign diplomats had any doubts about who ruled the country. Thus the hesitation or indecision he sometimes exhibited (or seemed to exhibit), the seeking of others' advice, and the listening to various opinions instead attest to cunning and skill at the game of politics. In any case there were good reasons for this method of reaching a decision, such as avoiding to engage the crown in a categorical way and leaving a way out; moreover, the awaiting of the (rather uncertain) course of events, the maneuvering and avoiding of commitment already point to a certain decision (and a course of action). Perhaps the burden of responsibility created in Boris III a penchant for mysticism—an interest in astrology, fortune-telling, and other occult "sciences" (among his advisers was Lyubomir Lulchev, follower of Petūr Dūnov, the creator of the White Brotherhood sect), but it cannot be said that that influenced his decisions.¹⁴³

The king had certain phobias: fear of the Soviet Union (hence he made every effort to maintain diplomatic relations and avoid war); of Bolshevism and the Bulgarian communists (the fight against whom he encouraged); and finally, of Hitler and the military power of Germany. He himself rejected fascism and Nazism as an ideology and political system, especially the imposition of one-party rule and the Führer principle, in which he saw a clear threat to the monarchy (given the fate of the Italian king Victor Emmanuel III, father of his wife Giovanna). The

¹⁴¹ Stefan Gruev, *Korona ot trūni*, 427–428.

¹⁴² He is depicted as such by Nikolai Genchev, *Vūnshtnata politika na Būlgariya 1938–1941*, 178–179.

¹⁴³ Doncho Daskalov, *Tsar Boris III. Poznatiyat i nepoznatiyat* (King Boris III. Familiar and unfamiliar) (Sofia: Agato, 2001), 110, 120, 174–185, 193–194.

king strove primarily to keep Bulgaria out of the war and also to serve as a pillar uniting the nation by standing “above” party interests and class conflict. He defended the nation’s interests as he understood them, which is not contradicted by the fact of Bulgaria’s (coerced) alliance with Germany.¹⁴⁴

Another biographer of Boris III glorifies him as a “great historical personality” who ruled during a dramatic time of world cataclysm, and a “patriotic statesman” who conducted politics in a national spirit. His statesmanship found expression in the avoidance of extremes and the creation of a stable regime and conditions for economic growth and cultural achievements.¹⁴⁵ The king’s rehabilitation can hardly be missed in post-1989 historiography, and it happened exactly on those counts on which he was previously blamed—his defense of national interests (not just of the monarchy) and his balanced statesmanship above party politics (but not as a Führer).

From a different perspective, but also sympathetic toward the rule of Boris III, is Milcho Lalkov. In reference to the problems of modernization, he interprets (and justifies) the establishment of an authoritarian state in Bulgaria under the aegis of the king. It was based on still-existing paternalistic attitudes and looked for possibilities to accelerate modernization in conditions of “peripheral capitalism.” It was, in other words, a developmental authoritarian state. The regime is also interpreted as a constructive effort toward stabilization of the government and the state in conditions of political turmoil and irreconcilable extreme currents engaged in something like a civil war. As authoritarianism increased at the end of the 1930s, a personal cult of the king developed (he was praised as a “supreme leader”) and a myth that presented the monarchy as a supreme national asset, part of the nation’s heritage, and pillar of national identification. While it is true that the king was not a “Führer” in the Italian-German sense, according to Lalkov his leadership role went beyond the traditional monarchist legitimacy.¹⁴⁶

Rejecting the notion that there had been a fascist regime in Bulgaria inevitably reflects back on how we view the anti-fascist struggles, starting

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 120–121, 192–193, 205–208, 226–227.

¹⁴⁵ See also Nedyu Nedev, *Tsar Boris III. Biografiya* (King Boris III. A biography) (Sofia: Izdatelska kŭshtha MKI, 2001), esp. 440–443.

¹⁴⁶ Milcho Lalkov, “Boris III—mezhdŭ priznanieto i otritsanieto” (Boris III—between recognition and negation). In Petŭr Angelov, Dimitŭr Tsanev, and Milcho Lalkov, *Stranitsi ot bŭlgarskata istoriya. Sŭbitiya, razmisli, lichnosti* (Pages from Bulgarian history. Events, reflections, personalities), vol. 1 (Sofia: Prosveta, 1993), 143–174.

from the September Uprising of 1923. In the recent treatments it is not anti-fascist, though it is certainly communist; it was imposed by the Comintern (the Soviet Union) as export of revolution; and in any case it is seen as adventurous. Attention is now paid to some Central Committee members' opposition to this venture and the quick (and undignified) withdrawal across the border of its leaders (Georgi Dimitrov and Vasil Kolarov). There is no doubt that the (suppression of the) uprising radicalized broad masses (in Dimitrov's words, it "dug a chasm" between the people and the rulers) and even started a "civil war," but the question now is whether the violence (on both sides) was justified. Thus the issue is no longer the wisdom of continuing the armed course after the defeat of the uprising (as in the old discussion), but the wisdom of the course toward the uprising itself. The events are now interpreted primarily from a legitimist ("old regime") point of view instead of the communist standpoint, even though it is acknowledged that the authorities then abandoned legal frameworks and unleashed an unjustified terror.¹⁴⁷

Interest in the various attempts of mobilization in "fronts" against fascism decreased accordingly. The realization of the idea of a "popular anti-fascist front" in Bulgaria was quite weak, as shown in the previous chapter (the "united front" with the Bulgarian Agrarian Union). As pointed out by Stoicho Grüncharov, precisely when the Communist Party was offered the opportunity to realize the "popular front" with the legal opposition's offer of an all-national coalition in the beginning of August 1944, it refused—as it had already taken the course toward a rule by the Fatherland Front alone.¹⁴⁸ This is one more example of the gap between tactics and strategy, which in the case of the Communist Party was especially great because the other political forces found its ultimate goals unacceptable.

In post-communist times the narrative about the armed partisan resistance was questioned. To begin with, the alleged mass heroism was deflated, and the resistance was reduced to a more realistic scale: an initial period of small bands (*cheti*), occupied mostly with supplying themselves and surviving, and of far more dangerous urban clandestine

¹⁴⁷ Elena Statelova and Stoicho Grüncharov. *Istoriya na nova Bŭlgariya*, 403–407 (by Stoicho Grüncharov). Similar treatment of the September Uprising in Ivan Lazarov, Ivan Tyutyundzhiev, Plamen Pavlov, and Milko Palangurski, *Lektsii po bŭlgarska istoriya* (Lectures on Bulgarian history), part 2, *XVIII v. – 1944* (Eighteenth century to 1944). (Veliko Tŭrnovo, 1991), 160–162 (the section by Milko Palangurski).

¹⁴⁸ Ivan Bozhilov et al., *Istoriya na Bŭlgariya*, 495 (by Stoicho Grüncharov).

groups for executions and terror, then growing in numbers and strength since the spring of 1943.¹⁴⁹ In one account the resistance against the regime is presented under the rubric “civil war.” But in contrast with the old treatments, where the civil war is anti-fascist, a war of the people against the government, here it appears primarily as a deep rift cutting through the society itself, with one segment fighting the other and against the legal authorities (of the authoritarian regime). Also characteristic of this treatment is that the political opposition to the government is classified not into non-fascist (legal bourgeois opposition) and anti-fascist (the communists and their allies in the Fatherland Front), but into communists and non-communists, the latter represented by a legal bourgeois opposition and the “authoritarian” forces of Zveno, the leftists in the Bulgarian Agrarian Union, and others leaning toward the communists.¹⁵⁰

The armed partisan struggle was questioned in an entirely radical way. If there was no German occupation (but a comparatively autonomous regime), and if the regime in Bulgaria was not fascist, as most historians now acknowledge, then against whom did the partisans fight? Obviously, they fought against the Bulgarian state authorities and their pro-German policies. But is armed struggle against legitimate state authorities legitimate? Stoicho Grüncharov explicitly says “no,” especially as it was instigated and supported by a foreign state.¹⁵¹ One can, of course, point out that the regime was in a process of “fascization,” but in post-communist times this is not so convincing. Moreover, and even worse for the communist account, Bulgaria’s major contribution in the anti-fascist struggle on an international scale proves to be the non-participation of Bulgarian troops on the Eastern Front. However, this was not an achievement of the communists or the “people’s resistance,” as the older authors would like it to be, but of the royal government. The participation of the Bulgarian army side by side with the Russians after September 9, 1944, is the most important direct contribution, but this is not the glorified partisan resistance either.¹⁵²

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 480–499 (by Stoicho Grüncharov). From among the foreign authors, there is a realistic treatment of the partisan resistance in Marshall Miller, *Bulgaria during the Second World War*, 198–203; Nissan Oren, *Revolution Administered*, 70–74.

¹⁵⁰ Ivan Lazarov, Ivan Tyutyundzhiev, Plamen Pavlov, and Milko Palangurski, *Lektsii*, 179–181 (the part by Milko Palangurski).

¹⁵¹ Ivan Bozhilov et al., *Istoriya na Bŭlgariya*, 480 (the part by Stoicho Grüncharov). In the same sense Stefan Gruev, *Korona ot trŭni*, 404–405.

¹⁵² This is also affirmed by Ilcho Dimitrov, “Deveti septemvri,” 192.

What the communist regime feared finally happened: once the main thesis of a fascist rule was toppled, the other theses fell like dominoes. The question finally comes down to legitimacy. The communist regime rested upon a radical contestation of the legitimacy of the “old regime” (as fascist); the contestation of the legitimacy of the communist regime after 1989 (as totalitarian) partly restored the legitimacy of the old regime. This in turn undermined the legitimacy of the anti-fascist resistance in Bulgaria and even put it radically into question.

There remains a more general and indirect justification, namely that the struggle in Bulgaria was directed against fascism in the international arena, against “world” fascism (unequivocally abominable and condemnable), and against the Bulgarian authorities insofar as they were its allies and conducted pro-German politics. The international struggle against fascism thus lends a broader, though oblique, legitimacy to the communist partisan struggle, in spite of its “narrower” illegality from the point of view of the Bulgarian authorities. In fact, the resistance in Bulgaria is already interpreted in this—more modest and de-emphasized—key. For example, according to Ilcho Dimitrov, the resistance “introduced the Bulgarian contribution—relatively modest as it was—to the victory of the world anti-fascist coalition.”¹⁵³ Or, as Staiko Trifonov expressed in much stronger terms: from a global perspective the resistance in Bulgaria was part of the anti-Nazi coalition; from an internal perspective it was directed against a regime that was tied to the darkest forces in the world and started to adopt those forces’ ideology and political doctrine; that is why the resistance was anti-fascist.¹⁵⁴

In a different vein, according to Georgi Markov: “The resistance was part of the European one and took the part of the victorious anti-Hitlerite coalition, but at the same time it was directed from Moscow with far-reaching politico-ideological intent”; it was “an import of revolution,” and a very high price would consequently be paid for it.¹⁵⁵ In other words, anti-fascism was really anti-fascism, but pro-Soviet, and was directed at establishing Soviet influence in the country. Thus the guiding of the Bulgarian resistance from the Soviet Union during the war, though directed

¹⁵³ Ibid., 192.

¹⁵⁴ Staiko Trifonov, *Istoriya na Bŭlgariya za XI klas. Kniga za uchitelya*. (History of Bulgaria for the eleventh grade. A teachers’ handbook) (Sofia: Izdatelstvo “Otvoreno obshtestvo,” 1996), 145.

¹⁵⁵ Georgi Markov, *Pokusheniya, nasilie i politika v Bŭlgariya 1878–1947* (Assaults, violence, and politics in Bulgaria, 1878–1947) (Sofia: Voenno izdatelstvo, 2003), 315.

against fascism, does not look so unquestionably positive, and is even somewhat discredited, in view of what happened later. According to the same author, while in the occupied countries the fight was for national liberation, the civil war in Bulgaria became an embittered “class-party clash,” in which both the state and the outlawed partisans used illegal means and violence.¹⁵⁶ In other words, neither side was legitimate. This might be the most adequate way to make sense of the situation—ambiguous both from an internal (illegality on both sides) and international perspective (the right cause, but the wrong external influence). The ambiguity, it should be noted, comes from the negative view of the consequences.

Finally, the partisan resistance played one more role, and not without consequences. This can be expressed in a diplomatic way: though the role of the Red Army in Bulgaria’s postwar development was crucial, one should not neglect the significance of the previously overestimated “internal factor,” which alone among the satellites was able to organize armed resistance. Though it did not play a major role in the change, afterwards it was “an internal factor of paramount significance for the internal evolution in accordance with the demands of Soviet politics.”¹⁵⁷ Or it may be expressed in a militant communist way: the armed resistance played a major role in building “the most valuable cadres for the people’s-democratic state and for its armed forces—the people’s militia and the people’s army.”¹⁵⁸ One way or another, the armed resistance under communist guidance created the determined personnel and disciplined organization needed for the coercive assertion of the new regime. The war years of confrontation and violent struggle formed a considerable counter-elite, who took power thanks to the externally created opportunity and proceeded to impose the new order. That is the topic of the next essay.

¹⁵⁶ Georgi Markov, *Bŭlgarskata istoriya*, 263–264.

¹⁵⁷ Ilcho Dimitrov, “Za nov pročit,” 198.

¹⁵⁸ Nikifor Gornenski, “Vŭorŭzhenata borba,” in *Sotsialisticheskata revolyutsiya*, 177.

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CHAPTER 4

September Ninth, “People’s Democracy” and Socialism

This essay traces the evolution of the views on the communist takeover in Bulgaria (September 9, 1944), the “people’s democracy” (1944–1948), and socialism for the duration of the regime and after its fall. The communist regime shaped and strictly controlled knowledge about itself, its genesis, and its past. The regime’s ideologically distorted self-image is of interest to historiography as an extreme case in which historical knowledge is subject to direct politicization and ideologization in legitimating power. At first sight, notions about the past would seem to be fixed once and for all. But precisely because knowledge of the past is set in direct relation to an ever-changing present political agenda, it is not fixed but subject to revision. The fall of communism precipitated a radical re-evaluation and reconceptualization of the recent past, often referred to as the “rewriting” of history. While it restores many empirical “truths,” it also satisfies the moral sense of justice (primarily of the victims) and is played out in a social context not devoid of relations with politics, though of a different kind (as will be seen).

September Ninth

On September 5, 1944, the Soviet Union declared war on Bulgaria (an ally of Hitler’s Germany), and the Soviet army crossed the Danube and marched into the country. On September 9 political authority in Bulgaria passed into the hands of the “Fatherland Front,” consisting of several political forces under the guidance of the Bulgarian Communist Party. Communist rule would last for almost half a century. September 9 became September Ninth—its sacred beginning, a founding myth, and the major national celebration day. The naming-interpretation of this date was of

fundamental importance for the regime, because it defined the way it was established and thus directly affected its legitimacy. It mattered to the communist rulers whether they had assumed power with the force of the Soviet army or relying on their own guerilla forces (the partisans), whether by a military coup d'état or by a popular uprising. More precisely, at stake was the relation between these factors and their center of gravity: the Soviet army, the military coup d'état in Sofia (carried out by pro-communist officers), the takeover of power in various localities by the partisans, and popular support.¹

In the first days the communist leader of the internal resistance, Traicho Kostov, defined what happened on September 9 as an "anti-fascist revolution." This was rejected by Georgi Dimitrov, general secretary of the Comintern from 1935 until its dissolution in 1943 and head of the Foreign Bureau of the Bulgarian Communist Party, which directed the resistance from Moscow during the war. He created and imposed the formula that the events were an "armed popular uprising" (in another version, an "all-people's" uprising) against the monarcho-fascist dictatorship and the German occupiers; this characterization avoided the threatening impression of a social (class) revolution.² This formula was codified in the major party documents, especially authoritatively in Dimitrov's report before the Fifth Congress of the Bulgarian Communist Party in 1948.³ It

¹ The facts, with emphasis on the partisans' actions against the background of the Soviet advance, in *Istoriya na antifashistkata borba v Bŭlgariya 1939/1944* (History of the anti-fascist struggle in Bulgaria 1939/1944), vol. 2 (Sofia: Partizdat, 1982), 225–271. A presentation of the events with a different emphasis (the Soviet troops waiting for the "internal factor" to assume power) after 1989 in Evgeniya Kalinova and Iskra Baeva, *Bŭlgarskite prekhodi 1939–2005* (Bulgarian transitions, 1939–2005) (Sofia: Paradigma, 2006), 34–40.

² Petŭr Avramov, "Razvitie na vŭzgleda za Devetoseptemvriiskoto vŭstanie i narodnodemokratichnata vlast (1944–1948 g.)" (Development of the views on the uprising of September 9 and people's-democratic rule, 1944–1948), *Istoriчески pregled* 38, no. 3 (1982): 76–94, esp. 83.

³ Georgi Dimitrov, "Otechestveniyat front, negovoto razvitie i predstoyashnite mu zadachi. Doklad pred Vtoriya kongres na Otechestveniya front, 2 fevruari 1948 g." (The Fatherland Front, its development, and its forthcoming tasks. Report before the Second Congress of the Fatherland Front, February 2, 1948). In Georgi Dimitrov, *Sŭchineniya* (Works), vol. 13 (Sofia: Izdatelstvo na BKP, 1955), 447–508, citation on 469; Georgi Dimitrov, "Politicheski otchet na Tsentralniya komitet na BRP (k.) pred Petiya kongres na partiya, 19 dek. 1948" (Political report of the Central Committee of the Bulgarian Workers' Party [Communists] before the Fifth Congress of the party, December 19, 1948), in Georgi Dimitrov, *Sŭchineniya* (Works), vol. 14 (Sofia: Izdatelstvo na BKP, 1955), 221–349, esp. 271.

was underlined through repeatedly shown newsreels, featuring images of marching partisans and Soviet troops met by jubilant civilians.

Later on the events of September 9 were defined as a "revolution," with the characteristic implications of a fundamental change by force and with mass participation. The revolution was initially characterized as "people's-democratic" (while the idea of a two-stage revolution was in force) and later on as "socialist" from the very beginning. The latter definition was used by Todor Zhivkov at the Seventh Congress of the Bulgarian Communist Party in 1958, when the revolution was declared completed, and again in his speech on the thirtieth anniversary of September 9, 1944.⁴ Inevitably, the historians of that era chimed in, and the "socialist revolution of September Ninth" became a stable formula and a stock phrase.⁵ The term "popular uprising" was thereafter used for the particular events surrounding the power takeover, while the revolution became a generalized term for the process then initiated.⁶

The role of the military coup d'état carried out by pro-communist army officers (associated with the pro-communist leaders of the former Military League Damyan Velchev and Kimon Georgiev) on the eve of September 9 was either passed over in silence or minimized. The communist regime was not satisfied with a narrow conspiratorial takeover but wanted to have come to power by a mass (all-people's) uprising, emphasizing its popularity. The same function is fulfilled even better by the term "revolution," which, in addition to mass participation, implies heroism and glory, but also irreversibility and thoroughgoing consequences. As will be seen, it would be used later on to justify or downplay the violence—with the idea that there is no revolution without violence.

Especially sensitive was the issue of the role of the Soviet army. It appears indisputably in the role of "liberator" of the Bulgarian people—a "second liberation" after the liberation from Ottoman rule by Russia in

⁴ Todor Zhivkov, "Otchetan doklad na Tsentralniya komitet na Bŭlgarskata komunisticheska partiya pred Sedmiya kongres na partiyata (1958 g.)" (Report of the Central Committee of the Bulgarian Communist Party before the Seventh Congress of the party, 1958), in Todor Zhivkov, *Izbrani sŭchineniya* (Selected works), vol. 4 (Sofia: Partizdat, 1975), 5–198, esp. 178; Todor Zhivkov, *Izbrani sŭchineniya* (Selected works), vol. 22 (Sofia: Partizdat, 1976), 433.

⁵ The very titles are indicative: Slavka Petrova, *Devetoseptemvriiskata sotsialisticheska revolyutsiya 1944* (The socialist revolution of September 9, 1944) (Sofia: Nauka i izkustvo, 1981); Lyubomir Ognyanov, *Devetoseptemvriiskata sotsialisticheska revolyutsiya* (The socialist revolution of September 9) (Sofia: Narodna prosveta, 1984).

⁶ Such a view in Slavka Petrova, *Devetoseptemvriiskata sotsialisticheska*, 494–495.

1878—but the question is: to what extent? Stalin did not spare the self-esteem of the Bulgarian communists: the power in Bulgaria passed into the hands of the “working class” “not by an internal uprising, but by help from outside, from the Soviet troops, thus easily, without much effort.”⁷ It was precisely this, however, that was unacceptable from the point of view of the internal legitimacy of the communist regime. For that reason the Bulgarian party leaders and the historians following in their steps, though they could not reject the “decisive role” of the Soviet army, paid special attention to the internal revolutionary factor. The formulations are different, and the point of departure is Georgi Dimitrov: “the combination of the popular uprising on September 9, 1944, with the victorious march of the Soviet army in the Balkans.”⁸

The authors who first wrote about this subject were not troubled by the excessive role of the Soviet army. Take, for example, the following statement by Nikifor Gornenski: “In Bulgaria, fortunately for our people there came the liberating Soviet army, which gave the surest guarantee for an entirely natural development of the people’s-democratic revolution, undisturbed by any external interference or external forces.”⁹ Gornenski’s identification with the Soviet Union is such that he does not consider it an external force, and he assumes the same loyalties on the part of the reader.

The official *History of the Anti-fascist Struggle in Bulgaria* (1982) describes the role of the Soviet army with emphasis on the “internal factor.” With its very presence and “without directly taking part in the class struggle,” it “overwhelmed” and “paralyzed” the fascist and bourgeois forces while simultaneously arousing “a wave of unrestrainable enthusiasm from the people”; “it triggered the release of its revolutionary energy and reinforced its certainty of the inevitable historical victory.” By advancing slowly the Red Army allowed “the role of the internal forces to become prominent” in the takeover of power by the Fatherland Front.¹⁰ However,

⁷ Georgi Dimitrov, *Dnevnik, 9 mart 1933–6 fevruari 1949* (Diary, March 9, 1933–February 6, 1949), ed. Dimităr Sirkov, Petko Boev, Nikola Avreiski, and Ekaterina Kabakchieva (Sofia: Universitetsko izdatelstvo “Sv. Kliment Okhridski,” 1997), 644–645.

⁸ Georgi Dimitrov, “Politicheski otchet,” 271.

⁹ Nikifor Gornenski, *Vŭorūzhenata borba 1941–1944* (The armed struggle, 1941–1944) (Sofia: Izdatelstvo na BKP, 1971), 232–233; Nikifor Gornenski, *Vŭorūzhenata borba na bŭlgarskiya narod za osvobozhdenie ot hitleristkata okupatsiya i monarkho-fashistkata diktatura, 1941–1944 g.* (The armed struggle of the Bulgarian people for liberation from Hitlerite occupation and the monarcho-fascist dictatorship, 1941–1944) (Sofia: Izdatelstvo na BKP, 1958), 287–288, 317.

¹⁰ *Istoriya na antifashistkata*, vol. 2, 271–272.

the help of the Soviet Union was neither an "export of revolution" nor interference in the course of development of Bulgarian society; the uprising of September 9 was a "Bulgarian deed" and a completion of the anti-fascist struggle.

According to Lenin, for a revolution to take place, a revolutionary situation is necessary, in which the broad masses stop obeying their rulers, who cannot rule in the old manner. This notion is logically problematic (because it contains a vicious circle), and its application to the Bulgarian case sounds especially naïve: the revolutionary situation awaited the right moment for its ripening, namely the Russian troops. According to the *History of the Anti-fascist Struggle*: "The ripening of the revolutionary situation, which was formed step by step in the process of organizing and deploying of the resistance, was finally completed on the eve of September 9, 1944."¹¹

To cite one author, whose very polemics clearly demonstrate the problem with the internal factor: "The victory on September 9 attests not to an internal revolutionary helplessness and external interference, but to a historically rare favorable interaction between internal and external factors."¹²

One has to be familiar with the implicit meanings and references in order to understand the following statement (in 1980): The uprising of September 9 succeeded "with the help" (the word "decisive" is omitted) of the Soviet army, which created conditions for launching the social revolution, "generated by the Bulgarian social conditions and taken up by the Bulgarian masses."¹³ The revolution was not something introduced from the outside, but a "Bulgarian phenomenon," a result of the class contradictions within Bulgarian bourgeois society.

September 9 possesses another aspect as well, deriving not from the manner of taking power, but from the processes it cut short and those it initiated and hence symbolized. One thing seemed clear and remained unchanged until 1989: the old regime of "monarcho-fascism" came to an end (when exactly and how was considered in the previous essay). But the character of the newly established government remained a contentious issue and subject to politically motivated reappraisals, which reflected back on the initial date. The main issue was whether a transitional period

¹¹ Ibid., 274.

¹² *Narodŭt protiv fashizma 1939/1945* (The people against fascism, 1939/1945) (Sofia: Partizdat, 1983), 261 (chapter by Slavka Petrova). See also Slavka Petrova, *Devetoseptemvriiskata sotsialisticheska*, 491–492.

¹³ Dimitŭr Sirkov, *Antifashistkata borba v Bŭlgariya po vreme na Vtorata svetovna vojna, 1939–1944* (The anti-fascist struggle in Bulgaria during World War II, 1939–1944) (Sofia: Izdatelstvo na OF, 1980), 48, 49.

followed or the building of socialism began immediately. Here we pass to the “people’s democracy,” as the political and economic order of the initial period created in the name of the Fatherland Front was called, with certain “theoretical” claims.

“People’s Democracy” (1944–1948)

The idea of a “people’s democracy” was launched by Georgi Dimitrov as secretary general of the Comintern in 1936 in connection with the Spanish Civil War. Then it had to describe and justify an anti-fascist left government in which part of the bourgeoisie participated (included for political reasons in a “popular front” against fascism), still based on private property, and viewed tactically as a “transition” to a Soviet-type regime. After World War II this concept was applied to the states under Soviet influence to characterize the emerging new order in Eastern Europe. Initially this order differed both from the Soviet Union and from the old authoritarian governments branded as fascist. It was depicted as democratic, socially just, and humane, in keeping with the aspirations of the people, and as some peculiar “people’s democracy”—better than bourgeois democracy. Nothing happened without the consent of Stalin, who initially encouraged (in trying to preserve good relations with the Western allies) the idea of “peculiar” forms and ways of the transition towards socialism, without “dictatorship of the proletariat” or “rule by soviets.”¹⁴

According to the concept of people’s democracy in its initial and most “liberal” version, the countries of Eastern Europe could pass to socialism in a way different from the Soviet one, that is, without civil war and bloodshed, without “dictatorship of the proletariat” (but with parliamentary democracy) and without “rule by soviets” merging legislative and executive functions.¹⁵ This was considered possible because conditions

¹⁴ Stalin’s initial ideas on the issue in Georgi Dimitrov, *Dnevnik*, 464 (February 28, 1945), and 533–535 (September 2, 1946).

¹⁵ On the concept of “people’s democracy,” see Dragomir Draganov, *V syankata na stalinizma. Komunisticheskoto dvizhenie sled Vtorata svetovna voina* (In the shadow of Stalinism. The communist movement after World War II) (Sofia: Hristo Botev, 1990), 19–28. See also Ilcho Dimitrov, “Evolutsiya na vūzgleda za haraktera na ‘narodnata demokratiya’ (1944–1948)” (The evolution of the view on the character of the “people’s democracy,” 1944–1948). In Ilcho Dimitrov, *Mezhdū Mūnchen i Potsdam. Būlgarskata politika prez Vtorata svetovna voina. Istoricheski ocherti* (Between Munich and Potsdam. Bulgarian politics during World War II. Historical essays). (Sofia: Universitetsko izdatelstvo “Sv. Kliment Okhridski,” 1998), 198–213.

were different from those of the Russian Revolution, and because of the support of the Soviet Union. The government of the transitional period looked like this: multiparty cabinet on the basis of a program agreement for a reconstruction of the country that included only allies of the Communist Party (in Bulgaria—the parties in the Fatherland Front) and toleration of some oppositional forces. The guiding role of the Communist Party was implied in the formula of the guiding role of the working class. This rule of the working masses (*trudeshtite se*) was to be based socially upon an alliance between the workers and the peasants, by drawing in much of the middle bourgeoisie and even part of the "patriotic" big bourgeoisie, which was needed for the economic reconstruction in something like the Soviet NEP (New Economic Policy). At the same time the authorities were to conduct a policy of restricting the capitalist elements and of education in a socialist spirit to facilitate the passage to socialism.

What is most important here is the repudiation of the "dictatorship of the proletariat," which aroused in Dimitrov and other Comintern leaders grim memories of the Stalinist terror, in favor of parliamentary system and a certain pluralism. Needless to say, the building of socialism is not at issue in this concept, but only the copying of the Soviet road to it—that is why the system of people's democracy is conceived as a stage of transition. Nor is there any doubt concerning the Soviet model of socialism as the goal with its well-known features, such as single-party rule, nationalization of private property, collectivization of agriculture, extreme centralization, central administration of the economy and an all-encompassing plan, and education in accordance with communist ideology. The question is only about the ways and means for attaining socialism (on the Soviet model), and eventually the tempo.

The concept of "people's democracy" did not remain in this formulation for long. The conflict with Tito made Stalin aware of the dangers of "separate paths to socialism," and the beginning of the Cold War meant that Stalin no longer felt obliged to conform with the Western allies' wishes for a democratic order in Eastern Europe. What followed was a tightening of the socialist camp and an acceleration of the changes on the Soviet model. Stalin and Zhdanov's new line of intensifying the processes of Sovietization found expression in the creation of the Cominformburo at a meeting in Poland of the Communist parties, in September 1947. This new line was embraced with great fervor by Vŭlko Chervenkov and other Bulgarian Politburo members. The key words were "dictatorship of the proletariat," "intensification of the class struggle," and "acceleration" of the transformation. Important moments in the turn toward acceleration of

the processes in Bulgaria were a Politburo meeting in October 1947 (in the absence of Dimitrov), the plenum of the Central Committee in January 1948, another plenum in July 1948, and the Fifth Congress of the Bulgarian Communist Party in December 1948 (preceded by consultations with Stalin).¹⁶ Georgi Dimitrov was forced to compromise and actually gave in on the most important point of the proletarian dictatorship. Mito Isusov and other authors after him describe the vicissitudes of the disputes with great sympathy toward Dimitrov.¹⁷

A translation of communist jargon might be in order: “dictatorship of the proletariat” means, of course, dictatorship of the Communist Party (more precisely, of its leadership); also implied is revolutionary violence in the transition to socialism as in Russia, and the Stalinist (totalitarian) model of socialism. “Soviet regime” means a rule through revolutionary “soviets” (i.e., councils) as organs of the “dictatorship of the proletariat,” whose prototype were the workers’ and soldiers’ councils that emerged spontaneously during the Russian Revolution, soon to be replaced by bureaucratic state “soviets” merging executive and legislative functions.¹⁸

¹⁶ Especially Mito Isusov, *Stalin i Bŭlgariya* (Stalin and Bulgaria) (Sofia: Universitetsko izdatelstvo “Sv. Kliment Ohridski,” 1991), 135–170; Mito Isusov, “Georgi Dimitrov i politicheskata sistema na narodnata demokratsiya v Bŭlgariya” (Georgi Dimitrov and the political system of the people’s democracy in Bulgaria), *Istoricheski pregled* 38, no. 2 (1982): 27–58. See also Lyubomir Ognyanov, *Dŭrzhavno-politicheskata sistema na Bŭlgariya, 1944–1948* (The state-political system of Bulgaria, 1944–1948) (Sofia: Izdatelstvo na BAN, 1993), 189–234; T.V. Volokitina, *Programma revolyutsii u istokov narodnoi demokratii v Bolgarii 1944–1946 gg.* (The program of the revolution at the source of the people’s democracy in Bulgaria, 1944–1946) (Moscow: Nauka, 1990), 9–13; T.V. Volokitina, “Bolgariya na etape narodnoi demokratii (1944–1948)” (Bulgaria at the stage of people’s democracy, 1944–1948). In *Bolgariya v XX veke. Ocherki politicheskoi istorii* (Bulgaria in the twentieth century. Essays in political history) (Moscow: Nauka, 2003), 302–356, esp. 344–351.

¹⁷ Mito Isusov, “Georgi Dimitrov i politicheskata,” 52–54; Mito Isusov, *Stalin i Bŭlgariya*, 145–149, 156–163; 165–169; Mito Isusov, *Politicheskite partii v Bŭlgariya 1944–1948* (The political parties in Bulgaria, 1944–1948) (Sofia: Nauka i izkustvo, 1978), 448–451; Mito Isusov, *Komunisticheskata partiya i revolyutsionniyat protses v Bŭlgariya 1944/1948* (The Communist Party and the revolutionary process in Bulgaria, 1944/1948) (Sofia: Partizdat, 1983), 266–286, 318–323. See also Petŭr Avramov, “Razvitie na vŭzgleda,” 92. Stalin’s reply on the issue of the proletarian dictatorship (on the eve of the Fifth Congress of the Bulgarian Communist Party in 1948) in Georgi Dimitrov, *Dnevnik*, 644–645.

¹⁸ As pointed out by Seton-Watson, democratic rule by “soviets” disappeared as early as 1919, while the soviets of the Soviet Constitution of 1936 were bureaucratic organs of local administration. Hugh Seton-Watson, *The East European Revolution* (New York: Frederick Praeger, 1962) (first published 1951), 299.

The Bulgarian communists adopted the idea of "soviet rule" after their "Bolshevization" in 1919, copying the experience of the Soviet Union. After September 9, 1944, the committees of the Fatherland Front aspired to such a role in the initial period, when they monitored and even guided the activities of the local state administration. However, their functions were curtailed, and the new local administration was built by reconstructing the existing state apparatus.¹⁹

In his report to the Fifth Congress of the Bulgarian Communist Party in December 1948, Georgi Dimitrov finally defined people's democracy as a "form of the dictatorship of the proletariat."²⁰ Connected with this is his "dialectical" (actually: compromise) interpretation of September 9: that although the popular uprising initially set democratic tasks for itself, it could not help but shatter the basis of the capitalist system and go beyond the limits of bourgeois democracy.²¹ In other words, what happened then had a democratic plus partially socialist character. This statement would be selectively interpreted by subsequent party functionaries and historians to emphasize the socialist tendency of the rule established on September 9.

To say that people's democracy is a form of the "dictatorship of the proletariat" is tantamount to affirming that, on September 9, power passed immediately into the hands of the Communist Party (as a "vanguard" of the proletariat) and that the socialist revolution began right away, meaning that socialist measures were undertaken from the very first moment. This leads to a negation or underestimation of the transition period and, together with it, of the significance of the Fatherland Front and of the allied

¹⁹ On the role and development of the committees of the Fatherland Front in Bulgaria, see Petür Ostoich, *BKP i izgrazhdaneto na narodnodemokratichnata dŭrzhava, 1944–1947* (The Bulgarian Communist Party and the building of the people's democratic state, 1944–1947) (Sofia: Izdatelstvo na BKP, 1967), esp. 28–30, 40–65.

²⁰ In the report itself Georgi Dimitrov tried to dilute the thesis about the people's democracy: without being a "soviet regime," it could "successfully fulfill the functions of a dictatorship of the proletariat": Georgi Dimitrov, "Politicheski otchet," 292–299, the citation on 295. But in his concluding speech of the congress, he stated unambiguously (under Soviet pressure) that the rule of soviets and people's democracy are "two forms of the dictatorship of the proletariat": Georgi Dimitrov, *Sŭchineniya*, vol. 14, 341–349, the citation on 347. As pointed out by Mito Isusov (after 1989), the formula appeared in the concluding speech under the pressure of the leader of the Soviet delegation, M.A. Suslov. See Mito Isusov, *Politicheskiyat zhivot v Bŭlgariya 1944–1948* (Political life in Bulgaria, 1944–1948) (Sofia: Akademichno izdatelstvo "Prof. Marin Drinov" i Univerzitetno izdatelstvo "Sv. Kliment Okhridski" 2000), 392.

²¹ Georgi Dimitrov, "Politicheski otchet," 273.

parties. The historical course is thus retrospectively distorted in order to present it as directed toward socialism from the very beginning. Seen from today's perspective (and even earlier), dating communist rule ("dictatorship of the proletariat") from September 9 is not such a big problem, even if the socialist measures were somewhat delayed due to international circumstances. But things looked different to the historical actors at the time, many of whom hoped for a different course, especially since the Western allies helped nurture such illusions. This also created a certain problem in presenting the developments in socialist historiography. How serious should "people's democracy" be taken, given the official thesis that the socialist revolution began on September 9? How should the initial statements of the communist leaders about a "Fatherland Front era" and "people's democracy" be interpreted—as sincere or a tactical move? The latter, however, implies deceiving the broad masses who were not enthusiastic about socialism.

There is hardly a problem if one identifies entirely with the communist standpoint: this is just "tactics" until the time comes for realization of the "strategic" end goal.²² The hypocrisy is bad only from an external (democratic, liberal) point of view. Another author prefers a straightforward acknowledgement of the "peculiar mimicry" in making sense of the revolutionary process and cites considerations of Bulgaria's unsettled international situation as an explanation. That is why initially it was stressed that the Fatherland Front's rule was different from socialism, while later on what was stressed was its similarity and continuity with socialism.²³

Another interpretation is also possible—with a slight, but important, distancing that changes the meaning. Vesela Chichovska points out that communist propaganda did not speak of socialism during the first two years and attributes that to the "prejudices" of the working people regarding socialism (and especially on the question of property), the country's unsettled international situation, and the negative attitude of Britain and the United States. At the same time the Communist Party praised the Soviet example (while the opposition did not dare to criticize it) and underlined the depth of the transformations in Bulgaria, more substantial than "an ordinary democracy,

²² Such an explanation in Zlatko Zlatev, *Problemi na prekhoda ot kapitalizma kŭm sotsializma v Bŭlgariya* (Problems of the transition from capitalism to socialism in Bulgaria) (Sofia: Partizdat, 1982), 229–230. On the "tactics," "flexibility," and "maneuvering" of the Communist Party in the initial two to three years, also Mito Isusov, "Georgi Dimitrov i politicheskata," 30, 36–39.

²³ Ilcho Dimitrov, "Evolyutsiya na vŭzgleda," 240, 245.

limited within the bourgeois notions." This confused the opposition. As for the non-communist parties within the Fatherland Front, they accepted socialism in principle but thought that the country's democratization would continue for a longer time, before the socialist phase began, and overestimated to what degree the transformation in Bulgaria would differ from that of the Soviet Union.²⁴ Thus in an outwardly neutral and descriptive style, but allowing for a reading between the lines, Chichovska shows not only the development of the issue with people's democracy and socialism, but also the attitudes of those involved (and implies her own attitude). Among other things, this example demonstrates the subtle power of language in subverting the ideological fixation of meaning.

The disputes around "people's democracy" (and September 9) did not end with the Fifth Congress but were revived several times in connection with political events in the socialist "camp," and the formulas of the party functionaries were directly transferred into scholarship. Without going into detail, one can mention the notion (of the Soviet philosopher A.I. Sobolev) of a two-stage people's-democratic revolution, according to which it began as a bourgeois-democratic revolution of a new type (the first stage) and after that "grew" into a socialist revolution (second stage).²⁵ This idea was taken up in Bulgaria by Communist Party Secretary General Vŭlko Chervenkov in 1952, though in an attenuated form—as two stages of essentially the same revolution (and a rule of the working class in alliance with the peasants): a first people's-democratic stage (until the nationalization in December 1947), and a second stage, when work on the foundations of socialism began. The tasks of the revolution were democratic, anti-imperialist, and anti-capitalist in the first stage and socialist in the second stage. Interestingly (though not quite clearly stated), Chervenkov calls the rule of the worker-peasant alliance a "dictatorship of the proletariat" only in connection with its consolidation after the nationalization at the end of 1947.²⁶ This theory was regarded (not without reason) as

²⁴ Vesela Chichovska, "Primerŭt na Sŭvetskata strana i vŭzgleдите za perspektivite na sotsializma v Bŭlgariya (1944–1947)" (The example of the Soviet Union and the views on the prospects of socialism in Bulgaria, 1944–1947). In *Letopis na družhbata* (Chronicle of friendship), vol. 5 (Sofia: Izdatelstvo na OF), 163–202, esp. 171–172, 174, 176–177, 182, 185, citation on 172.

²⁵ Details in T.V. Volokitina, *Programma revolyutsii*, 14–22.

²⁶ Vŭlko Chervenkov, *Otechestveniyat front i negovite predstoyashti zadachi. Doklad pred Tretiya kongres na OF, iznesen na 28 mai 1952 g.* (The Fatherland Front and its forthcoming tasks. Report before the Third Congress of the Fatherland Front, delivered on May 28, 1952). (Sofia: Izdatelstvo na BKP, 1952), esp. 21–33.

a continuation of the formula of Georgi Dimitrov (to whom Chervenkov makes numerous references). Things were carried somewhat further by the philosopher Asen Kiselinchev (in 1956), who argued that there were two qualitatively different stages of a single (people's-democratic, not bourgeois-democratic) revolution and a "passing" or "growing" of the revolution from people's-democratic into socialist. During its first stage the revolution carried out predominantly democratic tasks, while during the second stage it fulfilled predominantly socialist tasks; the "people's-democratic" rule was not a "dictatorship of the proletariat" from the very beginning (though it functioned in a limited manner as such), but gradually acquired such functions and became proletarian (socialist) rule.²⁷

The issue was taken up again after the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, which denounced Stalin's cult, and the April 1956 plenum in Bulgaria, which denounced the cult of personality of Vŭlko Chervenkov. The adherents to the idea of "two stages" and of the "growing" of the revolution into a socialist one were associated with the cult of personality and became a target of critique. The most vocal critic was the leading Bulgarian Stalinist philosopher Todor Pavlov (long-time president of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences), whose formulations sound especially hard and dogmatic, a persistent repetition of the basic tenets without arguments: people's democracy is only a "form" of the revolution (and of the rule of the workers and the peasants), which is socialist in "content." The Fatherland Front and the Bulgarian National Agrarian Union (i.e., the peasant party) are disparaged as mere "peculiarities" of the revolution, while the solution of bourgeois-democratic (i.e., "merely" democratizing) tasks is regarded as concomitant and tactical.²⁸

When considering the notion of the two-stage revolution, one is struck by its casuistic character and the search for the smallest differences and nuances in the formulations. Obviously the main goal was to reject the "wrong thesis" and to denounce a political adversary, or at least to test one's readiness to obey by embracing the newest formula of the party leadership. Since the main assumptions were similar—namely, that the revolution is one (even if in progress), that it began on September 9, 1944,

²⁷ Asen Kiselinchev, "Za formite na prekhoda kŭm sotsializma" (On the forms of the transition to socialism), *Filosofska misŭl* 12, no. 3 (1956): 18–43, esp. 24–30.

²⁸ See his collected articles from 1955–1958: Todor Pavlov, *Harakter i znachenie na sotsialisticheskata revolyutsiya v Bŭlgariya* (Character and meaning of the socialist revolution in Bulgaria) (Sofia: Izdatelstvo na BAN, 1958), esp. 16, 18–19, 37, 59, 83, 89, 91, 108–109, 111.

and was dominated by the Communist Party, and that it solved initially anti-fascist and democratic tasks and eventually led to socialism—what was fiercely debated were things such as whether it “grew” into a socialist revolution or began as socialist and when exactly the “dictatorship of the proletariat” (i.e., the absolute dominance of the Communist Party) began. The most improbable and empirically dubious tenets were asserted in the process, namely that the “dictatorship of the proletariat” was established from the very beginning and socialist measures were immediately undertaken while the share of the other (anti-fascist, democratic) tasks was insignificant. At the same time the more nuanced and “dialectic” formulations that implied a gradual transition and heterogeneity of the system were rejected. The revolution is born full-fledged and complete as socialist under communist rule. The people’s-democratic transition that was emphasized precisely by the communist leadership in the first years is annulled and engulfed by the socialist revolution.

From the preceding “discussion,” the Seventh Congress of the BCP (1958) drew the following conclusions, ones that long remained obligatory. According to the new secretary general, Todor Zhivkov, the revolution in Bulgaria, while a people’s-democratic revolution in its form, was from the very beginning socialist in its character and a repetition of the Great October Socialist Revolution in its main features and according to its regularities. The thesis of the “growing” of one revolution into another, as well as the “two-stage” revolution, are explicitly rejected. One is warned against overestimating (in a “revisionist manner”) the significance of the merely democratic tasks of the revolution and against overestimating the significance of national peculiarities and paths—this comes after the “counter-revolution” in Hungary. Still, some national peculiarities are enumerated, such as people’s democracy as a “form” of the dictatorship of the proletariat; a broader social basis that included middle peasants and part of the bourgeoisie; the Fatherland Front; preservation of the Bulgarian National Agrarian Union (as an “ally”); and collectivization of the agriculture without nationalizing the land.²⁹ The Soviet experience in building socialism is, of course, elevated to the rank of a law-like regularity (*zakonomernost*), while everything else is degraded to a “peculiarity”

²⁹ Todor Zhivkov, “Otchetan doklad za Tsentralniya komitet na BKP pred Sedmiya kongres na partiyata (1958)” (Report of the Central Committee of the Bulgarian Communist Party before the Seventh Congress of the party, 1958). In Todor Zhivkov, *Izbrani sŭchineniya* (Selected works), vol. 4 (Sofia: Partizdat, 1975), 5–198, esp. 178–189, citation on 178.

or at best a “form” through which the essence of the phenomenon transpires.³⁰

On the occasion of the thirtieth anniversary of the “victory of the socialist revolution in Bulgaria” (in 1974), Zhivkov declared again:

“Achieved with the decisive assistance of the Soviet army, the September Ninth revolution was from its very beginning a socialist revolution, a repetition of the Great October in its basic and main features. Of course, the September Ninth Revolution also solved general-democratic and anti-fascist tasks. This was its peculiarity as a socialist revolution.”³¹

The “general democratic” and anti-fascist tasks of the revolution are characteristically relegated to the background and even become a “peculiarity” of the (now socialist) revolution, in contrast with Georgi Dimitrov, for whom its progression into socialism (by encroaching upon capitalism) was a peculiarity. The historians took up the lead. One author of the academic *History of Bulgaria* weighs, using the new scales, the “relatively small volume” of the bourgeois-democratic tasks.³² According to another party historian enlightened retrospectively by the new tenet, “a socialist revolution was waiting to be carried out in Bulgaria. The unresolved bourgeois-democratic tasks... were not such as to demand another, bourgeois-democratic stage of the revolution.”³³ The question of the character of the revolution was closed for discussion for some thirty years after 1958, and Todor Pavlov (as president of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences) stated flatly that the issue was resolved by a party congress and that there could be no other opinions or viewpoints on the subject.³⁴

³⁰ Ilcho Dimitrov describes the circumstances that led to the rejection of the theses of specific national paths and national specifics of the revolutions in the socialist countries, namely the events in Hungary, the propaganda of the “Yugoslav model,” the theories of “national socialism,” and so on. See Ilcho Dimitrov, “Drugaryat Todor Zhivkov za Devetoseptemvriiskata sotsialisticheska revolyutsiya” (Comrade Todor Zhivkov on the socialist revolution of September 9). *Istoricheski pregled* 41, no. 9–10 (1985): 3–23, esp. 8–13.

³¹ Todor Zhivkov, *Izbrani süchineniya* (Selected works), vol. 22, 433.

³² *Istoriya na Bülgariya* (History of Bulgaria), second revised edition, vol. 3 (Sofia: Nauka i izkustvo, 1964), 484 (the chapter by Kiril Dramaliev).

³³ Slavka Petrova, *Borbata na BKP za ustanovyavane na narodnodemokraticeskata vlast, mai-septemvri 1944* (The struggle of the Bulgarian Communist Party for the establishment of people’s democratic rule, May–September 1944) (Sofia: Izdatelstvo na BKP, 1964), 234–235.

³⁴ Todor Pavlov, *Oshte vednüzh za haraktera na Devetoseptemvriiskoto vüstantie. Nyakoi teoretiko-metodologicheski vüprosi na sotsialisticheskata revolyutsiya* (Once again on the character of the uprising on September 9. Some theoretical-methodological issues of the socialist revolution) (Sofia, 1960), 30.

The previously mentioned *History of the Anti-fascist Struggle in Bulgaria* (1976) undertakes a mechanical attempt to reconcile the views of Georgi Dimitrov and Todor Zhivkov. The regime established on September 9 is initially defined (echoing Dimitrov) as a "people's-democratic government of a united front with an anti-fascist orientation" (several parties under the guidance of the Communist Party, alliance with the middle peasants, no civil war, etc.). It is then stated (echoing Zhivkov and the one-time adversaries of Dimitrov) that September 9 "in fact" marked the beginning of the socialist revolution in Bulgaria and that the people's democracy of the Fatherland Front established itself from the very beginning as a specific form of "dictatorship of the proletariat." The explanation given, which carries Dimitrov's logic to an extreme, is that the resolution of the democratic and anti-fascist tasks turned inevitably into political action against the whole bourgeois class and against capitalism as such; a consistent struggle for democracy "organically" passes into a struggle for a proletarian dictatorship and for a more advanced social order.³⁵

The trick here and elsewhere consists of the "passing" of the struggle for democracy into a struggle for socialism, which was indicated as early as 1935 in the Comintern tactics of combining the struggle for democracy (against fascism) with a struggle for socialism. This requires a peculiar understanding of democracy, in which the Soviet type of socialism appears as a broadening and deepening of democracy (the so-called socialist democracy) as well as an implicit separation of capitalism and the bourgeoisie from democracy, which is something good for socialism as well—hence, the rejection of "bourgeois democracy." To make things more convincing, the dialectic is sometimes evoked, as in the formula of a "dialectic relationship between the struggle for democracy and the struggle for socialism."³⁶ Moreover, the former "grows" into the latter, implying a development from a lower to a higher form.

The idea that the revolution has a socialist character from its very beginning draws additional support from historical arguments—by shifting the struggle for socialism back into World War II. Another argument involves stressing the purely bourgeois (not fascist) character of the last Bulgarian government appointed just a few days before the communist

³⁵ *Istoriya na antifashistkata*, vol. 2, 280–284. Similarly in *Narodŭt protiv fashizma*, 255–257.

³⁶ Stoyan Petrov, "Politicheskata liniya na BRP v godinite na vŭorŭzhenata borba, yuni 1941–septemvri 1944 g." (The political line of the Bulgarian Workers' Party in the years of the armed struggle, June 1941–September 1944), *Izvestiya na Instituta po istoriya na BKP*, vol. 29 (Sofia: Partizdat, 1973), 306–320, esp. 320.

takeover and defined as a “last reserve of the bourgeoisie” and a “shield from socialism.” From this it follows that the anti-fascist resistance turned towards the end into a struggle against capitalism as well. The same purpose is served by highlighting the fact that Bulgaria was not occupied during the war; hence the struggle was not for national liberation, but was primarily a class struggle and even a “civil war” waged against one’s own bourgeois government—in other words, a struggle for a new social order.³⁷ As we saw in the previous chapter, these were all revisions of the initial interpretation of fascism and the anti-fascist resistance.

The views on September 9 and the “people’s-democratic” phase (or “form”) were projected backwards in history and engendered the curious debate on the character of the September “anti-fascist” (communist) uprising in 1923. Questions such as whether its “strategic goal” was to address only democratic tasks as a preparation for a socialist revolution or also take on socialist (anti-capitalist) tasks in parallel, and even how long the solution of the former would eventually take until the solution of the latter began, were discussed in all earnest. These debates and the considerable literature are presented by the influential historian Dimităr Kosev, whose own position (informed by the “correct” thesis about September 9, 1944) is that the “worker-peasant rule,” in the name of which the uprising was declared, was a “particular form of the dictatorship of the proletariat” (and not merely a “worker-peasant democratic rule”) and that the insurgents had as their goal “to overthrow the bourgeois domination and, together with the implementation of broad democratic reforms, to carry out thorough revolutionary changes with socialist content.”³⁸ According to Kosev, had the September Uprising succeeded, the government it would have created “could not have been anything other than a dictatorship of the workers and laboring peasants under the guidance of the working class headed by the Communist Party.”³⁹ One can compare this with the prog-

³⁷ In his article about Todor Zhivkov, Ilcho Dimitrov stresses precisely these points (developed by him elsewhere) in support of the socialist character of the revolution of September 9, 1944, from the very beginning. See Ilcho Dimitrov, “Drugaryat Todor Zhivkov,” 4, 16–17.

³⁸ Dimităr Kosev, “Harakter na Yunskoto i Septemvriiskoto vŭstanie prez 1923” (Character of the June and September uprisings in 1923), *Istoricheski pregled* 43, no. 1 (1987): 18–41, esp. 26–27, 40–41; Dimităr Kosev, *Septemvriiskoto vŭstanie 1923* (The September Uprising, 1923) (Sofia: Nauka i izkustvo, 1973), 15–16.

³⁹ Dimităr Kosev, *Mezhdunarodnoto znachenie na Septemvriiskoto vŭstanie 1923 g.* (The international significance of the September Uprising in 1923) (Sofia: Izdatelstvo na BAN, 1964), 216–220, citation on 216.

nosis that the would-be government would be democratic, but "growing" into socialist (i.e., the rejected view about September 9, 1944) and the mediating view (of Nedyu Nedev) about a "new non-Soviet, people's-democratic worker-peasant rule and state in both form and content under the guidance of the working class and its revolutionary vanguard."⁴⁰ This rather complex formula needs deciphering: the September Uprising of 1923 was intended to result in a "people's democracy" of the type established on September 9, 1944, but it should be understood not as a stage to a dictatorship of the proletariat (as in the rejected two-stage theory of "growing") nor as a pure dictatorship of the proletariat (as in Kosev, following the official thesis), but as something else—"people's democracy" both in form and content (implicitly against Todor Pavlov), but nevertheless under communist guidance and of a socialist type (to be on the safe side).

While counterfactual reasoning about the past and imagining alternate outcomes is entirely legitimate, the scenarios in this case are based on the misleading analogy with September 9, 1944—more precisely, upon the changing party tenets of what it was. Besides, the September Uprising of 1923, declared on the instructions of the Comintern, is hardly an appropriate subject for counterfactual reasoning, as it was doomed and its suppression presented no problem for the government; if necessary the victors in the war would have interfered to suppress it, while the chance that Soviet Russia would help the insurgents was zero.

During the 1960s the historians directed (or were allowed to direct) their attention to the initial "people's-democratic" period, which gradually receded into the past.⁴¹ They introduced considerable empirical material, presented entirely within the official theoretical framework and from the perspective of the Communist Party, which imposed its truth as unique and obligatory for all. The Communist Party standpoint (*partiinost*) postulates at a fundamental level which direction History ("the revolutionary process") goes and separates the "good" (progressive, revolutionary, popular) forces from the "bad" (reactionary, counter-revolutionary, restorationist, anti-popular, fascist) forces, which hamper the development

⁴⁰ Nedyu Nedev, *Za haraktera na Septemvriiskoto vŭstanie 1923 g.* (On the character of the September Uprising in 1923) (Sofia: Izdatelstvo na OF, 1973), esp. 111–119, 128–129, citation on 129.

⁴¹ Zlati Zlatev, "Istoriografiya na sotsialisticheskoto stroitelstvo v Bŭlgariya" (Historiography of the construction of socialism in Bulgaria), in *Problemi na bŭlgarskata istoriografiya sled Vtorata svetovna voina* (Issues in Bulgarian historiography after World War II) (Sofia: Nauka i izkustvo, 1973), 515–535. See also T.V. Volokitina, *Programma revolyutsii*, 20–21.

and try to turn it “backwards.”⁴² This is clearly manifested in the historiography on the destruction of the bourgeois opposition and the ideological-political “evolution” of the allies from the Fatherland Front.

While the opposition to the communists outside the Fatherland Front is treated as an enemy per se (most often denounced as fascist), the “evolution” of the allied parties within the Fatherland Front toward socialism is portrayed as a struggle between the “healthy forces” within them (also called revolutionary, labor-combatant—*trudovoborcheski*, popular-frontist) and the “right-wing” elements, in which the former gradually take the upper hand. The activities of the “rightists” in their own parties are presented as “schismatic,” “secessionist,” and “factional,” although they were the truly authoritative and legitimate leaders of their parties, while the “leftist” pro-communist activists did not carry much authority or weight. The “rightist” forces are the archenemies in the narrative, generalized and condemned in nouns derived from the names of their leaders (*nikolapetkovisti*, *kostalulchevtsi*) or substantivized in bad phenomena (*gemetovshchina*, i.e., everything connected with G.M. Dimitrov). The development of these parties consists of a series of internal splits and coups, which communist historiography presents as initiated by the “rightists,” while in fact they were provoked by the pro-communist activists encouraged from the outside by the Communist Party, which at every stage supported the more leftist (i.e., pro-communist) activists against those more to the right. At the next stage the previous leftists would be pushed to the

⁴² Kolyo Kukov, *Razgrom na burzhoaznata opozitsiya, 1944–1947 g.* (The defeat of the bourgeois opposition, 1944–1947) (Sofia: Izdatelstvo na BKP, 1966); Vasil Yotov, *Ideino-politicheskata evolyutsiya na BZNS* (The ideological-political evolution of the Bulgarian Agrarian National Union). (Sofia: Izdatelstvo na BZNS, 1966); Vasil Vankov, “Ideino-politicheskata evolyutsiya na BZNS prez 1947–1948 g.” (The ideological-political evolution of the Bulgarian National Agrarian Union in 1947–1948), *Istoricheski pregled* 16, no. 6 (1960): 51–60; Yordan Zarchev, *BZNS i borbata za ukrepvane na narodnodemokratichnata vlast* (The Bulgarian National Agrarian Union and the struggle for consolidation of people’s-democratic rule). (Sofia: Izdatelstvo na BZNS, 1977); Petür Ostoich, “Ideinoto i organizatsionno razvitie na BRSDP ot 9. XI. 1944 do 5. VIII. 1945 g.” (The ideological and organizational evolution of the Bulgarian Worker Social-Democratic Party from September 9, 1944, to August 5, 1945), *Izvestiya na Instituta po istoriya na BKP*, vol. 21, 1969, 93–139; Ilcho Dimitrov, “Naroden süyuz ‘Zveno’ (1. X. 1944—19. II. 1949 g.)” (Peoples’ Union “Zveno,” October 1, 1944–February 19, 1949), *Istoricheski pregled* no. 5, 1970; Nikolai Genchev, “Razgromüt na burzhoaznata opozitsiya v Bulgariya prez 1947–1948 g.” (The defeat of the bourgeois opposition in Bulgaria, 1947–1948), *Godishnik na Sofiiskiya Universitet. Ideologicheski katedri* 56 (1962), no. 2 (Sofia, 1963), 181–274.

right by even more pro-communist activists. After a few such splits, only entirely pro-communist activists would remain and "represent" the remnants of the respective party recognized by the communists as their ally. Forced to abandon the Fatherland Front's faction of their party, the rightists would join the opposition and be regarded as reactionaries, restorationists, and even fascists (who were "disguised" or "undercover" before). In the case of the Social Democratic Party, the "healthy" forces fought against the "reaction" represented first by the party leader Krüstyü Pas-tukhov, then against Kosta Lulchev, and after that against Grigor Chesh-medzhiev, until the leadership was finally seized by political nonentity Dimitür Neikov, who liquidated the party by merging it with the Communist Party. In the case of the influential Bulgarian National Agrarian Union—the communists' greatest rival—the "evolution" included the removal from the leadership first of Georgi M. Dimitrov (called Gemeto to differentiate him from the communist leader), of the next agrarian leader Nikola Petkov (who then headed the opposition and was later executed), and then of Aleksandür Obbov (and Georgi Dragnev), until finally the "healthy" forces of Georgi Traikov prevailed. However, the latter's suggestion to disband the Agrarian Party was not accepted by the communists, who needed the party as an instrument to influence the peasants and an expression of the "alliance" between the workers and the peasants.

Besides the "organizational" evolution, the two above-mentioned parties underwent an "ideological evolution." In the case of the Social Democrats, it consisted of the renunciation of the "broad socialism" (a Bulgarian variety of revisionism) and "evolutionism" of its past and of the influence of Western social democracy of the present and realigning with revolutionary communism as well as acceptance of the Soviet model of socialism. In the case of the Bulgarian Agrarian Union, the ideological evolution consisted of the renunciation of the cornerstones of its traditional ideology, such as the so-called "estatist ideology" (according to which the peasants are an "estate," whose interests are represented exclusively by the Agrarian Party), the idea of "peasant government" and the principle of small-scale private property (the peasant smallholding) while accepting the "alliance" with the proletariat and the leading role of the Communist Party as well as the socialist collectivization of the land. Within this general framework the individual authors differ in the use of facts and in vocabulary and style between implacably militant and more moderate and "neutral."

Another characteristic feature is the treatment of the communist repressions, namely as a "just retribution." In the writings (as previously in

real life) the very notions of court, law, judgment, and guilt are not juridical, but refer to morals and conscience, are treated as dependent on class, and assume the collective guilt of the old politicians and the ruling class. To cite one author:

“The People’s Court was a collective conscience, the conscience of the majority, which asserted its notions of guilt and retribution in a new and just manner by the force of the public wrath—it was a revolutionary court guided by ruthless conscience and ardent reason, according to the sentiment of the class struggle.”⁴³

Another author sees advantages to the extraordinary tribunal, the so-called People’s Court, in the selection of the judges (“devoted anti-fascists”) by the committees of the Fatherland Front, while he mentions as “weaknesses” of the court its duration of six months instead of three (for reaching verdicts on approximately 11,000 people) and some “liberal” features, such as the right of the defendants to call an unlimited number of witnesses and have two defense lawyers. These “weaknesses” “diluted the work” and reduced the tension of the masses, and allowed for intercessions and the bending of the courts so that the last trials “were not conducted with the necessary expedience and did not achieve the desired results.”⁴⁴

However, these are not works of professional historians, but of political journalists and ideologists, although the line is difficult to draw. The professional guild issued more neutral descriptions, even if from a communist standpoint. Most of the historians simply avoided the period as too “hot” and heavily ideologized, and some made a start in it but soon withdrew. The founding of a section of contemporary history at the Institute of History of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences gave a new impetus to the research on this early socialist era and put it on a more professional basis. The head of the section, Mito Isusov, became a leading scholar of the political system of the “people’s democracy” and gathered around him some of the capable historians of the next generation.

Socialist historiography on the economy of the people’s-democratic transition and the initial building of socialism is not very exciting. It contains not-quite-reliable descriptions of the postwar economic reconstruc-

⁴³ Ivan Paunovski, *Vŭzmezdiето. Tsarskite sŭvetnitsi, ministrите i regentite pred Narodniya sŭd 1944–1945* (Retribution. The king’s advisers, the ministers, and the regents before the People’s Court) (Varna: G. Bakalov, 1982), 8–9.

⁴⁴ Ivan Peikov, *Razgrom na svalenata ot vlast monarkho-fashistka burzhoaziya v Bŭlgariya, 9 septemvri 1944–septemvri 1945* (The fall of the unseated monarcho-fascist bourgeoisie in Bulgaria, September 9, 1944–September 1945) (Sofia: Nauka i izkustvo, 1982), 84, 131.

tion, nationalization, industrialization, and collectivization, usually divided in accordance with the five-year plans.⁴⁵ One interesting exception is the concept of "state capitalism" applied for the analysis of one sector of the economy of the transitional period (until the nationalization at the end of 1947).⁴⁶ As elaborated by Petko Petkov, state capitalism ranged from mixed state-private enterprises, defined as its "supreme form," to state regulation and control over the private capitalist enterprises, defined as a "lower" form. The latter consists of forms such as the system of obligatory state deliveries, economic mobilization of the enterprises by the state, regulation of the distribution of the raw materials, state control of imports, processing of state-owned materials for the state by private factories, the taking of private capitalist profits by taxation and other obligations, state regulation of prices, direct state control in capitalist enterprises by representatives of the state, leasing of state and communal enterprises to private persons, concessions for extraction (of raw materials), the buying of agrarian produce (by private traders) for the state on commission, and control over the private insurance companies. Precisely when considering such "lower" forms of state control can one gauge how squeezed the private sector was, how "conditional" the private property had become, and to what extent the return on capital had diminished. In fact, the capitalist entrepreneurs were turning, in a sense, into managers of their own factories and could not even stop production, all this allegedly in favor of the working class. In addition Petkov reveals the state's dominant role in various sectors of the economy (for instance, the almost entirely etatized credit sector and the railways) and through various leverages inherited from the former wartime regime. The question is that in such a treatment (which is obviously correct), the whole economy of the transition, and not just one sector of it, appears as "state-capitalist," notwithstanding the reservation (made by Petkov) that what was taken away from the capitalists

⁴⁵ Zlati Zlatev, "Pregled na istoriografiyata," 524–532.

⁴⁶ Petko Petkov, "Formi na dŭrzhaven kapitalizŭm v nashata ikonomika prez pŭrviya etap na narodnata demokratsiya, 1944–1947 g." (Forms of state capitalism in our economy during the first stage of people's democracy, 1944–1947), *Izvestiya na Visha partiina shkola "Stanke Dimitrov" pri Tsentralniya komitet na Bŭlgarskata komunisticheska partiya*, 1958, no. 2, 194–259; Petko Petkov, "Sotsialno-ikonomiceskata sŭshtnost na dŭrzhavniya kapitalizŭm v prekhodniya period ot kapitalizma kŭm sotsializma v nashata strana, 1944–1947 g." (The socioeconomic nature of state capitalism in the transition period from capitalism to socialism in our country, 1944–1947), *Izvestiya na Visha partiina shkola "Stanke Dimitrov" pri Tsentralniya komitet na Bŭlgarskata komunisticheska partiya*, 1958, no. 5, 29–75.

went to the working people. Moreover, while the state-capitalist arrangement is presented as “transitory” (until nationalization, when the rest of the capitalist property and production would become socialist and obey the “socialist economic laws”), there is a striking similarity between the total state regulation and administration of the economy thus described and the state management of the thoroughly socialist economy after the nationalization. The similarity in the total bureaucratization and control of the economy was revealed and criticized by the Yugoslav “revisionists” (with whom Petkov takes issue), who proposed workers’ management of the enterprises instead of the bureaucratic state socialism. The similarity and, indeed, the overlap between state socialism and state capitalism (also in the exploitation of the working class) was pointed out even earlier by Western authors, including socialists, who considered the Soviet economic system to be “state socialism” and the socialist managers there to be a class or a caste substituting for the capitalists. Probably because of such dangerous analogies, the concept of “state capitalism” was not pursued further, in spite of Petkov’s efforts to refute Yugoslav “revisionists” and the Western authors and notwithstanding the references to Lenin concerning the elements of state capitalism in Russia after the Bolshevik revolution. As will be seen, “state socialism” as described after the fall of communism closely resembles the state-capitalist concept.

The 1980s witnessed a growing interest in “people’s democracy” as an idea and in Georgi Dimitrov’s attempt to defend it before Stalin and the ardent Stalinists in the Bulgarian Politburo. Mito Isusov tried surreptitiously and inconclusively to assert Dimitrov’s original idea of the people’s democracy as a “transition period” to socialism instead of “dictatorship of the proletariat” from the beginning (the official line). In his idealized picture of the “people’s democracy” with its political (party) pluralism, democratic rights and freedoms, and broader social base, one can detect a certain counterpoint to the contemporary “advanced socialism.” Pointed out as advantages of the “people’s-democratic form” of the socialist revolution are precisely traits that the earlier hard-liners considered to be deficiencies and evidence of immaturity.⁴⁷ However, it would be exag-

⁴⁷ Mito Isusov, *Komunisticheskata partiya*; Mito Isusov, *Politicheskite partii*, esp. 444–454, 466, 468–469. The two books faced serious obstacles, and censorship, before their publication. The first was discussed by authorities all the way up to the Secretariat of the Central Committee of the Communist Party; it eventually appeared in an expurgated form. On this subject, see the interview with Mito Isusov in *Istoriitsite za istinata, za nasiliyata, za sebe si* (Historians on truth, coercion, and themselves) (Sofia: Universitetsko izdatelstvo “Sv. Kliment Okhridski,” 1994), 128–152, esp. 132.

gerated and incorrect to see dissidence (even if on a narrow anti-Stalinist basis) in this (not quite justifiable) idealization of Georgi Dimitrov as a kind of anti-Stalin, and idealization of the people's democracy. What can be seen here is, at most, a vague dream of a different and more humane face of socialism, of a better course of development aborted under pressure from Stalin.

It should be mentioned here that during the communist regime, Georgi Dimitrov's diary was kept classified, and only a limited number of "trustworthy" persons had access to it.⁴⁸ It was published only after 1989, and for good reason: it would have revealed unpleasant facts about the regime and its master builder that had become even more awkward with the passage of time, the fostering of more liberal attitudes, and the disappointment with socialism. The diary of Bogdan Filov (the pro-Nazi premier of Bulgaria in the first years of the war) was also classified to prevent rehabilitation of the old regime (according to hard-liners' sensibilities). Paradoxically, Dimitrov and Filov both proved to be dangerous for the communist regime, particularly Dimitrov, given that, in the end, the regime published Filov's diary, even if for a limited "use by specialists" (*sluzhebno polzvane*), while it never published Dimitrov's diary.⁴⁹

Socialism in Progress

As the era of the "construction of socialism" progressed, the need arose for the regime to establish a consistent periodization with characteristics of the separate periods. With minor differences in chronology, it looks like this: the era of the socialist revolution in Bulgaria began with the takeover of political power on September 9, 1944, and ended in 1958 (by which time collectivization was also completed). This was marked by the Seventh Congress of the BCP, which called itself a "congress of the victory of socialism." The end of the revolution marks the end of the transitional period from capitalism to socialism.⁵⁰ Then began (variously dated)

⁴⁸ About this in Ilcho Dimitrov, "Georgi Dimitrov i negoviyat dnevnik" (Georgi Dimitrov and his diary), in Georgi Dimitrov, *Dnevnik*, 11–54, esp. 12.

⁴⁹ On the circumstances around Filov's diary, see its editor: Ilcho Dimitrov, *Vsichko teche. Spomeni* (Everything flows. Memoirs) (Sofia: Tiliya, 2000), 205–209, 292–293.

⁵⁰ According to Marxist teaching, this is a transition from one "formation" to another during which a revolutionary transformation of the society takes place, while the debate about the people's democratic period is about dating the beginning of the socialist revolution.

the building of an “advanced [or developed] socialist society,” and from that time on socialism would be called “advanced” or “developed” (or “mature”). The two major periods are divided into sub-periods dated with slight differences, depending on the importance that the authors accord to certain reforms in the economy or in the administration. Let us consider these sub-periods as described in the contemporary historiography, which followed the officially postulated periods, but in “filling” them with empirical content introduced some emphases of its own.⁵¹

According to the regime, the socialist revolution in Bulgaria lasted from 1944 to 1958. It started with the already covered “people’s democracy” phase (1944–1948), when the system of government known as “people’s democracy” emerged and was consolidated as a form of the “dictatorship of the proletariat.” In the autumn of 1947 began an “acceleration of the revolutionary process,” which led to the nationalization of the banks and industrial enterprises at the end of 1947 and the abolishment of the multiparty system in 1948. Thus the revolution was politically victorious.

The second phase (1948–1958) of the revolution is defined by some authors as a period of “building the foundations of socialism” (a term derived from the Sixth Congress of the Communist Party in 1954) and by others as an “all-out construction” of socialist society. The revolutionary transformations spread to all spheres of life, including the economy, where the “material-technical basis” of socialism was created through forced industrialization, electrification, and the collectivization of agriculture; the social structure, where the petty bourgeois masses were drawn into socialist relations of production and socialist social relations; and the cultural sphere, characterized by an orientation toward Marxism-Leninism and the creation of a new intelligentsia. An important political event of this period was the cult of personality of Vŭlko Chervenkov (during the late forties and early fifties), which was expressed by violations of the Leninist norms of party life, subjectivism, voluntarism, and a dogmatic approach, resulting in “distortions” in many public domains. This was the time of the Stalinist repressions against important communist functionaries in the campaign against Traicho Kostov. (Kostov was domestic party leader during the war and was the party’s second-highest leader, behind Georgi Dimitrov, after the war; he was executed in 1949.) The cult of

⁵¹ Most clearly the periods in Mito Isusov, “Za periodizatsiyata na nai-novata bŭlgarska istoriya” (On the periodization of recent Bulgarian history), *Vekove* 2, no. 1 (1973): 64–71.

personality was overcome thanks to Todor Zhivkov (secretary general since 1954) at the April plenum of the Central Committee in 1956, which followed the lead of the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (February 1956) in denouncing the cult of the Bulgarian Stalin. The period ended with the Seventh Congress of the Communist Party in 1958, which declared the victory of socialism in all spheres—in addition to the earlier victory in the political sphere, there was the formation of socialist relations of production, a new social structure, and socialist culture.

With the passage of time, the April plenum, at which Todor Zhivkov assumed power (although it took him some time to assert it), became an increasingly important and "epochal" event, which opened up long-term prospects of development and created an impression of continuity and unity in the activities of the Bulgarian Communist Party. The Twentieth Congress adopted a special resolution in connection with the twenty-fifth anniversary of the April plenum. In it the April line was proclaimed "Leninist" (i.e., in tune with the ideas and deeds of Lenin) and "fundamental," while Zhivkov was praised as a "worthy continuer of the great deeds of Dimităr Blagoev and Georgi Dimitrov."⁵² An unrestrained apologetics in prose and poetry unfolded around the historic April and its creator Todor Zhivkov, signaled by expressions such as "April spirit," "April hearts," and the "April generation" of creative writers and artists. Ironically, the very event that supposedly overcame the cult of personality of Chervenkov became the central event of the new cult of the fighter against the old one—Zhivkov.

The end of the 1950s (or, according to others, the mid-1960s) is the official beginning of the construction of the "advanced [or developed] socialist society" in Bulgaria. The period began with an unrealistic attempt at speeding up development—the idea of the "Great Leap," formulated in Zhivkov's report to the October plenum of the Central Committee in 1958 (possibly inspired by China). According to the directives for the development of the national economy for the period 1961–1980 (approved at the Eighth Congress in 1962), the construction of the material-technical basis

⁵² *Rezolyutsiya na Dvanadesetiya kongres na BKP vŭv vrŭzka s 25-godishninata na Aprilskiya plenum na Tsentralniya komitet na BKP ot 1956 g.* (Resolution of the Twelfth Congress of the Bulgarian Communist Party in connection with the twenty-fifth anniversary of the April plenum of the Central Committee of the Bulgarian Communist Party in 1956) (Sofia: Partizdat, 1981), 6, 19. See Lyubomir Ognyanov, *Aprilskata politika na BKP, 1956–1980* (The April policies of the Bulgarian Communist Party, 1956–1980) (Sofia, 1981).

of socialism was to be completed and the gradual passage to communism was to begin in this period.⁵³ Numerous experiments were conducted in the economy and the administration—a new system of planning and management of the economy in 1963–1965, “concentration” of the production (in big industrial plants), emphasis on “scientific-technical progress,” “intensification,” and so on. But the “Great Leap” did not materialize. The self-assured prognosis of entering the era of communism as early as the end of the 1960s or until 1980 at the latest proved to be overhasty, and the documents that contained it were removed from circulation.⁵⁴ More realistically, the communist leadership started talking about an “advanced (or mature) socialist society.”

The Tenth Congress of the Communist Party in 1971 adopted a program for building an advanced socialist society in Bulgaria. This process is characterized as a “more or less prolonged period, during which the material-technical basis of socialism is being completed, the socialist social relations are perfected, the intellectual culture is enriched, the well-being of the people is increased.”⁵⁵ After the fall of communism, this stage and the long-term program for increasing the living standard of the population adopted in December 1972 were interpreted by one author as an equivalent of the officially criticized “consumer society” of the West.⁵⁶

The characterization of advanced socialist society sparked certain discussions. The actual and dramatic question was: can it be that advanced socialism is less developed than the capitalist societies of the West? In a

⁵³ Todor Zhivkov, *Izbrani sūchineniya* (Selected works), vol. 3 (Sofia, 1971), 116–148. These directives, adopted at the Eighth Congress of the Bulgarian Communist Party in November 1962, follow the resolutions of the Twenty-second Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in October 1961. See about the “Great Leap” Niko Yakhiel, *Todor Zhivkov*, 112–122, 233–234. Also Iliyana Marcheva, *Todor Zhivkov—pūtyat kŭm vlastta. Politika i ikonomika v Bŭlgariya 1953–1964* (Todor Zhivkov—the road to power. Politics and economy in Bulgaria, 1953–1964) (Sofia: Kota, 2000), 194–196, 216–218.

⁵⁴ In the multi-volume edition of Zhivkov’s works, his report to the October plenum of the Central Committee in 1958 is substantially cut; his report at the January plenum in 1959 is omitted.

⁵⁵ *Programa na Bŭlgarskata komunisticheska partiya. Prieta na X Kongres na BKP, 24 april 1971 g.* (Program of the Bulgarian Communist Party. Adopted at the Tenth Congress of the Bulgarian Communist Party, April 24, 1971) (Sofia: Partizdat, 1984), 41.

⁵⁶ Marcheva, Iliyana. “Bŭlgarskiyat pŭt kŭm Evropa prez vtorata polovina na XX vek. Sotsialno-ikonomicheski shtrikhi” (The Bulgarian road to Europe in the second half of the twentieth century. Socioeconomic traits), *Istoricheski pregled* 56, no. 5–6 (2000): 148–168, esp. 160–161.

1970 book the Marxist philosopher Nikolai Iribadzhakov (editor-in-chief of the communist theoretical journal *Novo Vreme*) elaborated the (rather orthodox) view that the development of material production, of the forces of production, and of the relations of production is the main criterion for the superiority of socialism. With dogmatic implacability he insisted that advanced socialism, in order to be considered really advanced, should have overtaken capitalism (in the most advanced capitalist society) in all respects and in all components of the system, but most of all in the productivity of labor. Moreover, this had to be so not in a single socialist country, but in the whole socialist community. Criteria such as greater social justice or higher morals and the humanity of socialism were deemed unsatisfactory by this author.⁵⁷ According to the rival thesis, elaborated by philosopher Velichko Dobriyanov, a set of indicators should be taken into consideration (not only the productivity of labor), and the system should be viewed as an integrated whole. If there is one "integral" criterion, this is the manner of distribution, which under socialism is according to the work only (capital is eliminated), which is most just.⁵⁸ The discussion as a whole showed concern (and unstated apprehensions) about the achievements of actual socialism as regards the criteria of development put forward precisely by the classical authors, including distribution-consumption.

There are several characteristic traits in the laudatory self-description of socialism presided over by the rulers and repeated by numerous ideologists posing as social scientists: pointing out only achievements (as in the proverbial comparison with 1939); and treating development as uninterrupted progress ("ever more," "more complete") without crises or stagnation, all under the wise guidance of the Party (earnestly written with a capital "P"). The construction metaphors are also notable: "laying down the foundations" of socialism, "building" or "erecting" (the house of) socialism, plans and schedules of construction, and so on, that evoke socialist construction practices (but also their deficiencies). One can feel a cer-

⁵⁷ Nikolai Iribadzhakov, *Leninizm. Filosofiya. Ideologicheska borba* (Leninism. Philosophy. Ideological struggle) (Sofia: Nauka i izkustvo, 1970), esp. 166–182, 394–401; Nikolai Iribadzhakov, *Razvitoto sotsialisticheskoto obshtestvo* (The advanced socialist society) (Sofia: Nauka i izkustvo, 1982), 487–498.

⁵⁸ Velichko Dobriyanov, "Za osnovniya kriterii na razvitoto sotsialisticheskoto obshtestvo" (On the main criterion of the advanced socialist society), *Otechestven front*, no. 8253 and 8254, April 17 and April 18, 1971; Velichko Dobriyanov, *Izgrazhdane na razvitoto sotsialisticheskoto obshtestvo* (The building of an advanced socialist society) (Sofia: Partizdat, 1973), esp. 129–141, 146–147, 154–167.

tain lowering of the tone in the notion of “real existing socialism” that had to restrain the utopian horizon of socialism and neutralize society’s inflated expectations.⁵⁹

A curious moment arises in Bulgaria’s socialist chronology. Socialism was declared victorious in 1958 (at the Seventh Congress), while talk of an advanced socialist society emerged only in the second half of the 1960s, under the influence of the program of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. An advanced socialist society was mentioned explicitly for the first time in the documents of the Tenth Congress (in 1971). At the end of the 1960s, the stages of socialist development were discussed, and advanced socialist society was shifted back to the Ninth Congress in 1966 (which had announced a program to increase economic growth). Even thus the question arose: what about the period 1958–1966? Two opinions were formed: first, that advanced socialist society began immediately after the victory of socialism in 1958; second, that it began in 1966 (with the Ninth Congress) and was preceded by a period (1958–1966) of consolidation of the socialist society and the “preparation of conditions” for the building of an advanced socialist society.⁶⁰ This episode is characteristic of the “voluntaristic” (and wishful) manipulation of time by the communist regime. Socialism was losing steam, and the arrival of communist prosperity (“the bright future”) was delayed, postponed again and again by hard realities, in spite of numerous campaigns and attempts at reform. This was exactly what necessitated the various “transitory periods” of indefinite duration: after the initial revolutionary transition to socialism (1944–1958) came the above-mentioned “preparation of the conditions” for the building of advanced socialism, the building of advanced socialism itself, then an indefinite sojourn within advanced socialism and the “gradual transition” toward communism (announced for 1980 but later taken off the agenda).

The basic tenets of the communist regime remained unchanged until its end: the leading role of the Communist Party, “democratic centralism” (as

⁵⁹ On the notion of “real existing socialism,” see Ivaylo Znepolski, *Bŭlgarskiyat komunizm. Sotsio-kulturni cherti i vlastova traektoriya* (Bulgarian communism. Sociocultural traits and power trajectory) (Sofia: Institut za izsledvane na blizkoto minalo. Institut “Otvoreno obshtestvo,” Ciela, 2008), 255–267.

⁶⁰ Stoyan Petrov, *Sotsialisticheskoto obshtestvo v NRB—etapi i osobenosti* (The socialist society in the People’s Republic of Bulgaria—stages and peculiarities) (Sofia: Partizdat, 1987), esp. 72. See also Niko Yakhiel, *Todor Zhivkov*, 229–230. As Yakhiel points out, the question of the initial date did not receive a precise answer in the party program of 1971 and was left to the scholars.

the command system called itself), "public" (in practice, state) property, central planning and central management of the economy, and dependence on the Soviet Union (presented as "friendship" and "brotherhood"). For a long time the party forums and documents used the term "dictatorship of the proletariat" as a euphemism for the dictatorship of the Communist Party (i.e., its leadership) that claimed to represent it. The Tenth Congress in 1971 (following Soviet formulations) proclaimed the road to an "all-people's state" (*vsenarodna dŭrzhava*) as a final stage of the development of "socialist democracy," again under the leadership of the Communist Party (written in the new constitution, also adopted in 1971).⁶¹ One formula was replaced by another; both represented power in the way it wanted to be seen—in the latter case, with the widest possible "social base," in which the ruling party represents, and is supported by, the whole people.

The July Plenum in 1987 proved to be the last change in the ideological elaboration of socialism during the Bulgarian "perestroika." In the so-called July Concept, Zhivkov proclaimed the model of socialism elaborated in the Program of the Communist Party from 1971 to be obsolete and announced the creation of a new, specifically national model of socialism. The new model promoted "socialist self-management" with the following mantra: "from rule in the name of the people to rule through the people,"⁶² in words—but in words only—at the expense of the role of the Communist Party. Socialist self-management had to find expression in a certain autonomy of the "working collectives" and the territorial communities (the municipalities), mainly rights of the "working collectives" to manage property (but not to own it). At the same time the well-known axioms were preserved, such as the guiding role of the Communist Party (a "cutting edge" of perestroika and supervisor of its implementation), "democratic centralism," and the "dialectic unity of self-management and the monocratic principle," as well as the statement that socialist property is "one and indivisible." To dispel any misunderstandings, Zhivkov stated that this model had nothing to do with the attempts of "certain reformers"

⁶¹ Todor Zhivkov, "Otchetan doklad na Tsentralniya Komitet na Bŭlgarskata komunisticheska partiya pred Desetiy kongres na Partiyata. 20 april 1971 g." (Report of the Central Committee of the Bulgarian Communist Party before the Tenth Congress of the party. April 20, 1971) (Sofia: Partizdat, 1971), 194–195. Also *Programa na bŭlgarskata*, 44–46.

⁶² *XIII kongres na BKP. Dokladi i resheniya* (Thirteenth Congress of the Bulgarian Communist Party. Reports and resolutions) (Sofia: Partizdat, 1986), 24–25.

of socialism to create models of their own.⁶³ Thus until the end of communist rule, no “model of socialism” outside the framework of the single-party rule under Zhivkov with state property and mandatory ideology was allowed to exist, even in theory. There was not much progress in the economic sphere either, in spite of all the talk about reform and market economy. The end point is marked by Decree 56 of January 1989. This decree permitted the setting up of firms on the basis of any type of property (state, cooperative, and of various organizations) and the conduct of economic activities on one’s own account and on private initiative. But it included restrictions that made market forces powerless (e.g., excessive taxation, participation of the state in the supervisory boards, and no trading of shares).⁶⁴ The real effect of this was to prepare the ground for the privatization by the nomenklatura after the fall of the regime.

Aside from the bold opposition to communism in the early years, some critical thinking developed in Bulgaria during socialism and especially during perestroika. Direct political criticism of the regime remained taboo and cost the dissident émigré writer Georgi Markov his life. The country’s best-known dissident, Zhelyu Zhelev (who would become president after 1989), employed an Aesopean form of criticism, speaking about the institutional system of fascism while implying socialism.⁶⁵ There was also the free-thinking and outspokenness of personalities such as poet Radoi Ralin, historian Nikolai Genchev, and the writers Blaga Dimitrova and Georgi Mishev, as well as the inner emigration (withdrawal into silence) of poet Konstantin Pavlov. Furthermore, some economists exposed the unviability of the system and the failure of the reforms in the rather specialized jargon of their discipline.⁶⁶ Of a different sort was the indirect critique of social-

⁶³ “Osnovni polozheniya na kontseptsiyata za po-natatŭshnoto izgrazhdane na sotsializma v NR Bŭlgariya (odobreni ot plenuma na Tsentralniya komitet na BKP, sŭstoyal se na 28 i 29 yuli, 1987 g.)” (Basic tenets of the concept of the further construction of socialism in the People’s Republic of Bulgaria [approved by the plenum of the Central Committee of the Bulgarian Communist Party, which took place on July 28–29, 1987]). *Partien zhivot* 34, no. 12 (1987): 18–71, esp. 20–26.

⁶⁴ “Ukaz 56 za stopanskata deinost” (Decree 56 on economic activity), *Rabotnichesko delo*, no. 11, January 11, 1989.

⁶⁵ Zhelyu Zhelev, *Fashizmŭt. Dokumentno izsledvane na germanskiya, italianskiya i is-panskiya fashizŭm* (Fascism. Documentary research of German, Italian, and Spanish fascism) (Sofia: Narodna mladezh, 1982).

⁶⁶ About the critical economists, see Roumen Avramov, *Pari i de/stabilizatsiya v Bŭlgariya, 1948–1989* (Money and de/stabilization in Bulgaria, 1948–1989) (Sofia: Institut za izsledvane na blizkoto minalo, Institut “Otvoreno obshtestvo,” Ciela, 2008), last chapter.

ism from a national and sharply nationalist stance on a number of issues of Bulgaria's modern history, though it was crippled by the nationalist course taken by the regime itself. The regime's nationalist campaign against the Bulgarian Turks (known as the "regenerative process") since 1984 produced nationalist mobilization rather than opposition (in spite of weak protests). A few suppressed human rights initiatives apart, the first more serious opposition action was environmental (in defense of Russe, a town that suffered from gas emissions from neighboring Romania), though the environmental protest was interpreted as political by the rulers and dealt with accordingly.

Events in the Soviet Union and other socialist countries overtook the toying at reform and the search for a new model of "self-managing" economically viable socialism presided over by Todor Zhivkov, and he was ousted by an internal party coup d'état on November 10, 1989. It was only then that the communist leaders, adapting to the new circumstances and under the pressure of the burgeoning opposition, started to talk about "democratic socialism" (in contrast to the usual "socialist democracy") in the sense of a multi-party system, ideological pluralism, rule of law, and so on, and engaged in "social-democratizing" the party.

After Socialism, about Socialism: September Ninth Revisited

The fall of the communist regime made possible the free and initially heated polemics and expression of opinions about socialism and—with the passing of time—a scholarly professional study of the period. Access to some (though not all) of the archives caused the "archival revolution," the results of which are already available. It is hardly possible to review here the numerous and multifarious writings on Bulgarian socialism or its particular aspects and issues, among which much is journalism and mostly negative.⁶⁷ In what follows I will address mainly the struggles over symbols and the radical reassessments of key issues, as well as significant empirical studies of the era from new positions that have appeared since then.

The military coup d'état on September 9, 1944, suddenly acquired a special meaning and emphasis with some authors, obviously because it hinted at something narrowly conspiratorial and unraveled the notion of a

⁶⁷ See the extensive bibliography in Evgeniya Kalinova, *Iskra Baeva. Bŭlgarskite prek-hodi*.

mass uprising.⁶⁸ According to the historian Stoicho Grüncharov in a sharp polemical jab: the all-people's anti-fascist uprising was an "opera-buffo," and the power takeover happened through a banal military coup d'état. The cabinet ordered the army not to resist the invading Soviet troops; in addition, nobody resisted the "heroic" seizure of towns and villages by the partisans and the break-ins of the prisons.⁶⁹

The best-known historian of the era, Mito Isusov, showed consistency in insisting after the fall of communism that September 9, in spite of "external influences," was a primarily "national Bulgarian event."⁷⁰ The army officers who captured the Ministry of War belonged to the National Insurgent Liberation Army and did not act in the name of some would-be military cabinet, while the minister of war himself had changed sides to the Fatherland Front even before then. In a still more pointed (and improbable) way, in a posthumously published work, Isusov stated that political power passed into the hands of the Fatherland Front not as a result of a military coup d'état and the military victory of the Soviet Union, but as the result of a long anti-fascist resistance and an armed popular uprising; the Soviet occupation of Bulgaria, he said, was "a legend."⁷¹ As will be seen, in the new circumstances this author became a staunch champion not of the communist regime, but of his own socialist idea based on "people's democracy."

But the question was already not about the role of internal and external factors, but about fundamentals—the very meaning of what happened. In a full reversal, September 9 now began to symbolize (for anti-communists) not liberation from fascism, but Soviet occupation and the beginning of communist totalitarianism—"a third national catastrophe" (after the defeats in the Second Balkan War and in World War I).⁷²

⁶⁸ Lyubomir Ognyanov, *Dŭrzhavno-politicheskata sistema*, 9–11; Mincho Minchev, *Bŭlgariya otново na krŭstopŭt, 1942–1946* (Bulgaria at the crossroads again, 1942–1946) (Sofia: Tiliya, 1999), 77.

⁶⁹ Ivan Bozhilov and Vera Mutaŭchieva et al., *Istoriya na Bŭlgariya* (History of Bulgaria) (Sofia: Abagar, 1998), 498 (in the chapter by Stoicho Grüncharov); Elena Statelova and Stoicho Grüncharov, *Istoriya na nova Bŭlgariya, 1878–1944* (History of modern Bulgaria, 1878–1944) (Sofia: Anubis, 1999), 632–633 (the part by Stoicho Grüncharov).

⁷⁰ Mito Isusov, *Politicheskijat zhivot*, 7.

⁷¹ Mito Isusov, "Georgi Dimitrov na granitsata na dva sotsialni eksperimenta" (Georgi Dimitrov on the border of two social experiments), in *Georgi Dimitrov—mezhdū vŭzkhvalata i otritsaniето* (Georgi Dimitrov—between eulogy and repudiation), ed. Rima Kanatsieva and Tanya Turlekova (Sofia: Tsentŭr za istoricheski i politologicheski izsledvaniya, 2003), 95–106, esp. 96–97.

⁷² Dimitŭr Ludzhev, *Grad na dve epokhi. Istoriya na obshtestvenite grupi v bŭlgarskite gradove v sredata na XX vek* (A city of two eras. History of the social groups in Bulgarian

The authors of a panoramic presentation of the history of Bulgaria from World War II to the present day made an attempt to neutralize this symbolic date by adopting the insipid expression "the change on September 9, 1944," a date that led to "deep changes in the development of Bulgaria."⁷³ But this euphemistic substitution hardly solves the problem, which, at least for the time being, cannot be subject to value neutralization.

The drama and fatefulness of September 9 are captured in perspective and rendered with as much distancing as possible by Ilcho Dimitrov in a deeply felt reassessment of more recent Bulgarian history. This date is not a single moment, however decisive the power takeover may appear; for that reason, the method of the takeover—whether by a coup d'état, by Soviet divisions, or by internal forces—is irrelevant. The date is inseparably connected with the foregoing politics of the regime, which collapsed with the defeat of Germany. The date is also connected with the domestic forces represented by a legal bourgeois opposition and an armed communist resistance that were carriers of different blueprints for the future; but most of all with the decisive influence of the external factor—the Soviet army—given that Bulgaria's inclusion in the Soviet zone of influence was agreed upon among the Allies in advance. The fate of Bulgaria was decided outside its borders. Internal forces, however active, were subordinated to external factors, so that September 9 simply brought the regime and the government "in congruence with the partitioning of Europe." This explains the predominance of the communist forces and the eventual building of a Soviet-type regime, as well as the defeat of the pro-Western (bourgeois) political forces. The latter would have won had the Allies landed in the Balkans in the autumn of 1943 or had Bulgaria remained in the Western zone of influence, as Greece did.⁷⁴ In other words, September 9 was just the outcome of a clash between larger (primarily external) forces and longer-term trends.

ian cities in the mid-twentieth century) (Sofia: Universitetsko izdatelstvo "Sv. Kliment Okhridski," 2005), 7, 217; Ivan Bozhilov and Vera Mutafchieva et al. *Istoriya na Bŭlgariya*, 499 (by Stoicho Grŭncharov); Georgi Markov, *Bŭlgarskata istoriya vkratse* (Bulgarian history in brief) (Sofia: Izdatelstvo "Svyat," 1992), 269–271.

⁷³ Evgeniya Kalinova and Iskra Baeva, *Bŭlgarskite prekhodi*, 39, 40, 44.

⁷⁴ Ilcho Dimitrov, "Deveti septemvri v bŭlgarskata istoriya" (September 9 in Bulgarian history). In Ilcho Dimitrov, *Mezhdŭ Mŭnchen i Potsdam. Bŭlgarskata politika prez Vtorata svetovna voina. Istoricheski ocherti* (Between Munich and Potsdam. Bulgarian politics during World War II. Historical essays) (Sofia: Universitetsko izdatelstvo "Sv. Kliment Okhridski," 1998), 189–197, citation on 195.

The People's-Democratic Transition

After 1989 Mito Isusov elaborated freely his (previously) "revisionist" ideas. From this point of view, people's democracy seems like a genuine "experiment" of both a peculiar national path of development in Eastern Europe, and even more importantly, of a model alternative to Stalinist socialism. It was brutally suppressed by Stalin in favor of the Soviet model of expropriation and nationalization of the property, power monopoly of the Communist Party, bureaucratization of the rule, voluntaristic planning of the economy, and hegemony of the communist ideology.⁷⁵ Isusov preserves his attachment to the "socialist idea" as "intransitory" in its justness and humaneness. According to him a socialist society (in the sense of one that is humane, democratic, just, and civic) was never created in Bulgaria, not only because of the borrowed Soviet (Stalinist) model, but also due to economic and civic underdevelopment, and in fact, "no country on earth" had known a true socialist society.⁷⁶ In short, socialism—the true one—has never existed, but there was something else. Socialist values resemble ideas from another world, whose sacred purity can be preserved only by staying there so they are never tainted by contact with the real world (which poses the problem of implementation by people in a social order of institutions and practices). The worse the worldly deeds in the name of the ideas, the more otherworldly the ideas, to become (unrealizable) "ideals"...

But a "justification" of the people's democracy along any of these lines would not do in the post-communist circumstances. In the radical reappraisal this system was found to be infected with totalitarianism. According to one of the previous experts on socialism, it was during the initial years that the totalitarian system was imposed, as shown by the repression of political adversaries and the political trials, the repressive legislation and jurisdiction, the imposition of a single party, the merging of party and state structures, and the adoption of the Stalinist model.⁷⁷ We see how the

⁷⁵ Mito Isusov, *Stalin i Bŭlgariya*, 130–170; Mito Isusov, *Politicheskiyat zhivot*, 9–13, 410–420.

⁷⁶ Mito Isusov, *Politicheskiyat zhivot*, 13, 420; Mito Isusov, *Stalin i Bŭlgariya*, 219–220; Mito Isusov, "Georgi Dimitrov na granitsata," 95–96, 100, 104–106.

⁷⁷ Lyubomir Ognyanov, "Politicheskoto razvitiie na Bŭlgariya 1944–1948 g." (The political development of Bulgaria, 1944–1948), in *681–1948. Iz istoriyata na bŭlgarskata narodnost i dŭrzhava. Izsledvaniya, analizi, preotsenki* (681–1948. From the history of the Bulgarian people and state. Research, analyses, reassessments), ed. Milen Kumanov (Sofia: Pelikan Alfa, 1993, 284–294), esp. 284, 294.

debate about the beginnings of socialism reappears in inverse form as a debate about the beginnings of totalitarianism—whether immediately after September 9 or after an initial (people's-democratic) period.

People's democracy is treated in a more theoretical way and against a broader background in the works of the historian Dragomir Draganov and the Russian scholar T.V. Volokitina.⁷⁸ From this perspective it is an intermediate and transitional phase toward the imposition of the Soviet (Stalinist) model of socialism, at best something like a "democratic intermezzo." For a time it seemed that democratic roads toward socialism were possible and even an alternative to the Soviet model. But this democratic perspective soon gave way to the international confrontation of the Cold War and Stalin's new course toward unifying Eastern Europe on the Soviet pattern by banning all sorts of "national paths." The system of "people's democracy" is defined by the authors as a version of "consensual democracy," because it rested on agreement between a coalition of partners with different strategic goals. It was extremely unstable and contradictory, economically hybrid and politically conflict-ridden, and dependent upon external forces. In the end the radical leftist (communist) tendency prevailed over agrarianism and liberal democracy, but also over the more moderate social-democratic tendency within the socialist movement itself.⁷⁹

Apart from the external factors that determined such a development, according to some authors the Bulgarian case had very strong internal prerequisites, namely the leaning of the Communist Party (quite strong itself) on broad strata of radicalized and egalitarian poor peasants.⁸⁰ The communists skillfully utilized the "latent communism" of egalitarian attitudes, the leftist myth of social justice, and the envy and striving for social revenge to mobilize the masses, especially among the lower strata.⁸¹ The opposite thesis is also represented in historiography, namely the lack of

⁷⁸ T.V. Volokitina, *Programma revolyutsii*; T.V. Volokitina, "Bolgariya na etape"; T.V. Volokitina, G.P. Murashko, and A.F. Noskova, *Narodnaya demokratiya: mif ili real'nost?* (People's democracy: myth or reality?) (Moscow: Nauka, 1993); Dragomir Draganov, *V syankata na stalinizma*.

⁷⁹ T.V. Volokitina, G.P. Murashko, and A.F. Noskova, *Narodnaya demokratiya*, esp. 306–314.

⁸⁰ Vladimir Migevev, "Po vŭprosa za ustanovyavaneto na sŭvetskiya model na sotsializma v Bŭlgariya (1948–1951)" (On the question of the establishment of the Soviet model of socialism in Bulgaria, 1948–1951), *Istoricheski pregled*, 52, no. 5 (1996), 29–46, esp. 33–34.

⁸¹ Ivailo Znepolski, *Bŭlgarskiyat komunizŭm*, 76–81.

any internal prerequisites for shaping a socialist society in Bulgaria, argued by pointing to the Bulgarian urban strata's bourgeois attitudes and attachment to private property (an attachment the peasants shared).⁸² In fact, the two are not irreconcilable: the existence of anti-capitalist and leftist attitudes was not in itself sufficient to determine the political development toward socialism (which was predetermined from outside), but it facilitated its imposition.

Georgi Dimitrov

Together with the people's democracy, the personality and deeds of Georgi Dimitrov became the subject of re-evaluation. His was the first cult of personality of a communist leader to develop in Bulgaria (somewhat hushed up by Zhivkov in favor of his own glorification) and the last to be dismantled. Dimitrov is now presented as an instrument of Stalin and the main conductor of Sovietization in Bulgaria, who dealt brutally with the opposition and presided over the birth of the totalitarian regime. His mausoleum was removed from Sofia's city center—a gesture of great symbolic significance, carried out clumsily by the anti-communist government in 1999.

The symbolic battle around Georgi Dimitrov is attested to by the conference organized on the 120th anniversary of his birth, mostly in his defense and, for that reason, very indicative of the lines of attack, the most vulnerable points of his reputation, and the strategies of defense.⁸³ Evaluations of his deeds typically point out several assets and liabilities. Dimitrov is praised for his brave struggle against fascism with the two events that earned him fame worldwide—the Leipzig trial (1933) and his formulations of the anti-fascist front at the Seventh Congress of the Comintern in 1935. His pro-communist admirers consider his concepts of united, popular, and anti-fascist fronts to be a major theoretical contribution. More soberly, Nikolai Poppetrov shows Dimitrov as a flexible practitioner of *realpolitik* who launched various forms of political coalition with the intention of enlarging the circle of tasks and partners, but with an unwavering strategic goal.⁸⁴ Dimitrov is also credited with the concept of “peo-

⁸² Dimitŭr Ludzhev, *Grad na dve epokhi*, 24–25, 668.

⁸³ Rima Kanatsieva and Tanya Turlekova, eds., *Georgi Dimitrov—mezhdū vŭzhvalata i otritsanieto* (Georgi Dimitrov—between eulogy and repudiation) (Sofia: Tsentŭr za istoricheski i politologicheski izsledvaniya, 2003).

⁸⁴ Nikolai Poppetrov, “Georgi Dimitrov kato obekt na integralen izsledovatel'ski podkhod” (Georgi Dimitrov as an object of integral research approach), in *Georgi Dimitrov—mezhdū vŭzhvalata*, 159–171, esp. 165.

ple's democracy" as a peculiar way to socialism without "dictatorship of the proletariat," though it failed (or precisely because it failed, so that one could speculate on unrealized possibilities). As seen before, Mito Isusov went furthest in idealizing people's democracy as real democracy and a unique "social experiment" cut short by Stalin. But its democratic nature came to be contested, with good reason, and its violent and totalitarian traits were revealed.

The following entries are put on the negative side (especially by critics of communism): Dimitrov's role in the September Uprising of 1923 and the continuation of the course of armed struggle in its aftermath, which culminated in the terrorist act of bombing the Sveta Nedelya Church in 1925; his loss of stature and autonomy vis-à-vis Stalin during his long emigration in the Soviet Union (though he did not take part in repressions himself); and especially his role after returning to Bulgaria, when (willingly or not) he became an instrument of Soviet domination, including his role in the repression of the democratic opposition; and finally, his bowing to Tito on the Macedonian question (to be considered separately).

The reappraisal of the communist September Uprising in 1923 in particular led to a reassessment of the role of Georgi Dimitrov (and Vasil Kolarov). According to Stoicho Grüncharov, the uprising was a "criminal adventure" and "provocation," given that the government was prepared for it and that it had no chance of success. In addition, it was a glaring example of the Bulgarian Communist Party's role as an instrument of the Comintern and Bolshevik Russia to interfere in Bulgaria's internal affairs and to "export revolution." It also demonstrated Bulgarian communist leaders' willingness to sacrifice their own people in unleashing something like a civil war. Still more reckless and criminal was the communists' continuation of armed struggle after the September Uprising, which culminated in the terrorist act on April 16, 1925. The consequences of this act for the communists (and other leftists) were such that communist leaders in exile Georgi Dimitrov and Vasil Kolarov denied responsibility and blamed it on internal activists, especially on those killed—the so-called "leftist deviation" (*lyavo sektantstvo*).⁸⁵

Iskra Baeva offered a different interpretation of the September Uprising, calling it a brave revolutionary act "for the principle" without regard to consequences. From this point of view, it was a "painful necessity,

⁸⁵ Elena Statelova and Stoicho Grüncharov, *Istoriya na nova*, 404–421. See in more detail Georgi Naumov, *Atentatūt v katedralata "Sv. Nedelya." 16 april 1925 g.* (The explosion in Sv. Nedelya Cathedral, April 16, 1925) (Sofia: Partizdat, 1989).

aimed at preserving the prospects of revolution in Bulgaria” (and Dimitrov’s statement that it dug a chasm between the people and the rulers should be interpreted in this way).⁸⁶

There are also attempts to arrive at a general evaluation of Dimitrov. It is here that some strategies of vindicating him and of raising him onto a pedestal, though not creating a cult or a mythology, were put into practice. The new apologetic attempts rely rhetorically on the very “negation” of Dimitrov (and reject rhetorically his former cult or idealization) as they take the offensive. Receiving special emphasis is his international fame: he was one of the few “great” Bulgarians.⁸⁷ The problem here is that being universally known does not preclude evil—take Hitler or Stalin. Especially unconvincing is having him stand for “the great values of human morals, freedom, democracy, social justice, national independence, and cultural richness” (as one author would have it).⁸⁸ Another author describes him more vaguely as a fighter against the injustices of his times and for bright ideals (drawing a parallel between national and social revolutionaries).⁸⁹

One noteworthy attempt to distance and mediate is Ilcho Dimitrov’s treatment of Georgi Dimitrov in the long introduction to the latter’s *Diary* (published at long last).⁹⁰ Ilcho Dimitrov traces the major points of Georgi Dimitrov’s life and deeds by placing them in the context of the circumstances and the times. He is mostly positive about Georgi Dimitrov’s activities prior to his emigration to the Soviet Union (though somewhat ambiguous about the September Uprising), empathizing with his effacement and “personal tragedy” before Stalin while in the Soviet Union and more negative about his conduct after the war in Bulgaria: the retreat from the idea of “people’s democracy” and the imposition of the Soviet system, the repressions against political adversaries, bowing to Yugoslav pressure over Macedonia, and so on. Overall, Georgi Dimitrov is shown precisely as a communist activist, a fanatic of the communist idea and of the new

⁸⁶ Iskra Baeva, “Georgi Dimitrov—pogled ot nachaloto na XXI vek” (Georgi Dimitrov—a glance from the beginning of the twenty-first century). In *Georgi Dimitrov—mezhdú vŭzhkhalata*, 149–158, citation on 154.

⁸⁷ Nikolai Mizov, “Georgi Dimitrov prez pogleda na filosofa” (Georgi Dimitrov through the eyes of the philosopher), in *Georgi Dimitrov mezhdú vŭzhkhalata*, 172–187.

⁸⁸ Mito Isusov, *Georgi Dimitrov—Zhiznen pŭt i politicheski idei* (Georgi Dimitrov—life course and political ideas) (Sofia: Hristo Botev, 2004), 31.

⁸⁹ Iskra Baeva, “Georgi Dimitrov—pogled ot nachaloto,” 149–158.

⁹⁰ Ilcho Dimitrov, “Georgi Dimitrov i negoviyat dnevnik” (Georgi Dimitrov and his diary), in Georgi Dimitrov, *Dnevnik*, 11–54.

religion (in Ilcho Dimitrov's words), inseparably bound with the Soviet Union as the center of world communism and as a model of its social order. The essay ends on a conciliatory note: Georgi Dimitrov was "a man of his times," professed a socialist ideology, and conducted socialist politics. But he frequently abandoned his ideals, and he acted in a ruthless, repressive system and could easily have become its victim. Ilcho Dimitrov expresses regrets that the assessment of Georgi Dimitrov went "from one extreme to the other" as well as stating a classical hope for a "more objective judgment" in the course of time (implying this would lead to certain rehabilitation).

One may ask (at the border between scholarship and ethics): what does it mean to understand Dimitrov by placing him in context, and what does this entail? To "put yourself in someone's shoes" means to understand their deeds, but not necessarily to accept or justify them. Just as we can understand (but not praise) the leaders who hitched Bulgaria to the Third Reich, we can understand, but not justify, still less praise, Dimitrov's deeds under Stalin's pressure—especially since, unlike the former leaders, he acted more out of conviction than from coercion.

In fact, the fall of communism does not reduce Georgi Dimitrov's stature as a significant ("great") personality of national and international standing, but with a clear ideological and party identification—as a leader of the Bulgarian and the international communist movement. The question is not whether he was a "great personality," but for whom and because of what. He was certainly "great" on his terrain of belief and deeds—in other words, endowed with the necessary qualities and successful in his actions, a revolutionary of the highest rank (though necessarily in the shadow of the Big One in this camp). Yet in spite of his anti-fascism, he cannot be convincing as a democrat, because the "people's democracy" he envisaged was not at all democratic (not to mention that it led to the opposite), and it was then that the destruction of the opposition took place. Moreover, the position of hero-democrat is deservedly taken by his political adversary Nikola Petkov, who fought for democracy and civil rights and freedoms against the communist dictatorship emerging under Dimitrov's leadership (and who was executed with Dimitrov's active involvement).⁹¹ Dimitrov cannot be a "national hero" either, in the sense of a hero from a

⁹¹ See Georgi Gunev, *Kŭm brega na svobodata ili za Nikola Petkov i negovoto vreme* (Toward the coast of freedom, or about Nikola Petkov and his era) (Sofia: AD "Informatsionno obsluzhvane," 1992). The book is a parallel biography of Georgi Dimitrov and Nikola Petkov and culminates in the clash between them.

national(ist) standpoint, as the Bulgarian national revolutionaries under Ottoman rule were, because he professed the opposite credo—the international communist ideal—while in practice he helped subordinate the nation to the Soviet Union and almost ceded Pirin Macedonia to Yugoslavia. Nor was he a “great statesman,” insofar as that would entail conducting a relatively independent state policy (in this sense Stambolov was Bulgaria’s great figure); under Dimitrov national independence was virtually erased. In a certain sense Dimitrov is best described with his appellations from the times of the “cult of personality”—a “leader [*vozhd*] and a teacher of the Bulgarian people,” because this situates him in the context of the era. He was a leader and a teacher of the people with the arrogant claim of the communist leader to teach their people “the correct doctrine” and to lead them in a direction most of them did not want to go.

The Macedonian Question

The post-communist reappraisal could hardly bypass the national “nihilism” of the initial communist policies on the “Macedonian question” (quietly revised and changed much earlier). This is, in fact, the continuation of the “national question” under communist conditions, and it is also connected with the federative idea, which has a long prehistory, beginning with the projects of the national revolutionaries under Ottoman rule. Without purporting to trace the intricate developments so well described by some authors, I will only mark the main points of the reappraisal in an attempt at systematization.⁹²

To begin with, on a purely doctrinal level it is not the nation that is the highest value for socialism, but the working class, hence class “internationalism.” In the interwar period the Communist parties followed the Comintern policies on the national questions, subordinated to the pragmatic interests of the Soviet Union. Nations were arbitrarily invented (e.g., Dobrudjan, Thracian, and Macedonian) and their “right of self-determination” asserted, so as to provoke tensions in the existing states (in the Soviet interest). In practice, the individual Communist parties were more cautious on their national questions, especially since Comintern policies left them vulnerable to accusations of national treason.

⁹² Milcho Lalkov, *Ot nadezhda kŭm razocharovanie. Ideyata za federatsiyata v Balkanskiya yugoiztok, 1944–1948* (From hope to disappointment. The federation idea in the Balkan southeast, 1944–1948) (Sofia: Vek 22, 1994), esp. 84–85, 89–90, 113–115, 163–164, 258–259, 278–285.

During World War II Tito and his close associates claimed the leadership of the anti-fascist war in Macedonia and succeeded in imposing their will on the Bulgarian partisans (not without resistance), because Yugoslav support was more valuable for the Soviet Union, and Stalin backed Tito over Dimitrov.⁹³ The issue of Macedonia's future was postponed until after the war, but the Yugoslav part was constituted in advance as the "Republic of Macedonia" within the framework of the future Yugoslav federation. There were several theoretical options after the war: attaching the Bulgarian part of Macedonia (the Pirin district) to the republic of Macedonia and making it part of the Yugoslav federation; joining the two parts of Macedonia in the framework of a federation between Bulgaria and Yugoslavia as equals (known as the 1:1 ratio); joining the two parts of Macedonia again, but within a Yugoslav federation with Bulgaria as one of the republics (known as the 6:1 ratio); a broader federation of Bulgaria and Yugoslavia with Albania and Greece (in the event that the communist forces there won), in which the Greek part of Macedonia would also join the republic of Macedonia; and finally, the preservation of the status quo from before World War II (with Macedonia divided among Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, and Greece), which is what actually happened. The unification of Macedonia within Bulgaria, realized by Bulgaria during the war under Hitler's auspices, was voided by the Allied victory over Germany. The solving of the Macedonian "question" after the war was determined by several factors, of which the strongest was Stalin, but Tito's Yugoslavia was sufficiently autonomous, while Bulgaria was weakest because of its defeat and its full dependence on the victors. The other factor with considerable influence was Great Britain and the United States, who opposed the federation because they saw in it a threat to Greece (which was within their zone of influence). Given these general conditions and factors, Bulgaria and Yugoslavia were most active on the Macedonian issue, but Stalin interfered at the decisive moments, and the outcome finally depended on him.

The developments are meticulously described by Milcho Lalkov. In addition to Bulgaria's weakness as a defeated country, the Yugoslav leaders were more consistent and determined in their politics for solving the

⁹³ Doncho Daskalov, *Zhan sŭobshtava. Zadgranichnoto byuro i antifashistkata borba v Bŭlgariya, 1941–1944* (Zhan reports. The foreign bureau and the anti-fascist struggle in Bulgaria, 1941–1944) (Sofia: Universitetsko izdatelstvo "Sv. Kliment Okhridski" 1991), 171–180, 210–217. Also Marshall Miller, *Bulgaria during the Second World War* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1975), 130–134. In general Tito was more assertive while Dimitrov was more pliant, though the solution of the Macedonian problem was postponed until after the war.

question in their state-national interest, while the Bulgarian leaders (among them some in support of the Yugoslav claims) were more inconsistent and yielding. The ideological factor (of communist internationalism) also seems to have weighed more heavily on the minds of the latter. Still, Georgi Dimitrov and the Bulgarian leadership, who were enthusiasts of the federation, preferred the only variant that favored Bulgarian national interests, namely a federation as an inter-state union (in a 1:1 ratio). On the other hand they not only accepted the concept of a “Macedonian nation” but went further by agreeing to (in a resolution of the Tenth Plenum on August 9–10, 1946, confirmed at the meeting between Tito and Dimitrov in Bled in August 1947) and actually admitting emissaries in Pirin Macedonia to implement a Macedonization policy of “cultural-national autonomy” (including the teaching of Macedonian language and Macedonian history in the schools, and a propaganda campaign in the press) even before the issue of the federation was clarified and decided.⁹⁴

The crucial factor was Stalin, whose (changing) intentions can only be surmised. The authors point out possible considerations on his part: a federation in order to use Bulgaria and Dimitrov as a “Trojan horse” against Tito (who for that reason at a certain point rejected the federation); on the other hand, apprehensions of creating a strong state in the Balkans that might slip out of Soviet control; finally, moves in the strategic game with the Western allies.⁹⁵ One way or another, were it not for the conflict between Stalin and Tito, it is highly likely that the Bulgarian part of Macedonia would have been joined to Yugoslavia, most probably without a federation. Thus blaming the communist leadership for national “nihilism” (or, more strongly expressed, “treason”) in its initial years and for allowing an attempt at the “denationalization” of Pirin Macedonia are not unfounded. One can note that exactly on this point (and not about the repressions) the communist historians, who had become strongly nationalist during the years before 1989 and still more afterwards, felt especially vulnerable and compelled to avow the “sins” of the regime.⁹⁶

⁹⁴ As pointed out by Milcho Lalkov, part of the material from the negotiations in Bled—precisely the confidential part—was missing from the central party archive. Milcho Lalkov, *Ot nadezhda kŭm razocharovanie*, 247.

⁹⁵ Vitka Toshkova, “Yuzhnoslavyanskata federatsiya i konfliktŭt v elitnata troika: J. Stalin sreshtu J. Tito i Georgi Dimitrov” (The Yugoslav federation and the conflict in the elite troika: J. Stalin against J. Tito and G. Dimitrov), in *Georgi Dimitrov mezhdu vŭzhkhalata*, 68–81.

⁹⁶ For example, Mito Isusov, *Georgi Dimitrov*, 392–394, 422–427. Also Ilcho Dimitrov, “Georgi Dimitrov i negoviyat,” 36–37, 45–47, 50–51.

The Repressions

In the sharp political confrontation of the post-communist transition, attention became focused on the most taboo topic of the former regime—the “revolutionary” violence and repressions exercised by the Communist Party after September 9, 1944. These were variously directed against the functionaries of the “old regime” (the terror of the initial months, the People’s Court, the subsequent discrimination against the “former people” and the bourgeoisie); against the political opposition, consisting mostly of former allies of the communists within the Fatherland Front and some other politicians; against the military and the clergy; against communists in the campaign against the “enemy with a party card”; against peasants during the forced collectivization; against “hooligans”; and against dissident intellectuals.

The repressions, defined by the communist regime as “vengeance” and “purges,” took various forms: “spontaneous” (“wild”) violence and account-settling in the initial months, summary revolutionary justice and show trials, imprisonment and labor camps, labor mobilization, internment, dismissal from the state apparatus and the army, and various discriminations and disqualifications (for instance, in higher education and employment). They took place in several waves and spanned the period of the “people’s democracy” (1944–1948) and the “cult of personality” (1948–1953) and went well into the period of the “thaw,” especially after the events in Hungary in 1956, until 1962 (when the last camp was closed). Afterwards repression took milder and “preventive” forms.

The repressions have, to begin with, a purely quantitative dimension. But the establishment of even an approximate number of the victims (especially of the “wild” justice and account-settling with the former authorities) proves impossible because of the lack of documents and the incompleteness and destruction of archival materials. In the “war of figures,” the authors give a widely varying number of victims—between 18,000 and 30,000 people—which, in the absence of a basis for the estimates, cannot be taken even as a rough indication.⁹⁷ Others cite much smaller, but

⁹⁷ Dinyu Sharlanov, *Tiraniyata. Zhertvi i palachi* (The tyranny. Victims and hangmen) (Sofia: Strelets, 1997), 10, 26–27 (30,000 victims; also cited is the opinion of the main prosecutor of the People’s Court, Georgi Petrov, who puts the number at 5,000). Mito Isusov in *Vek 21*, March 6, 1991 (18,000 killed); Georgi Markov, *Pokusheniya, nasilie i politika v Bŭlgariya 1878–1947* (Assaults, violence, and politics in Bulgaria, 1878–1947) (Sofia: Voenno izdatelstvo, 2003), 317 (18,000 disappeared only in the initial months). Also Dinyu Sharlanov, Lyubomir Ognyanov, and Plamen Tsvetkov, “Bŭl-

documented, numbers, especially for the first lawless months—between 1,500 and 2,000 people.⁹⁸ From the point of view of professional historiography, a given figure may be considered proven only if trustworthy documents are available. If no records were kept or the documents were destroyed, the historian remains powerless.

Well documented is the “People’s Court,” which was unrivaled in Eastern Europe in its scale and in the harshness of its verdicts, and which presented a parody of legality.⁹⁹ It was established through an emergency law in violation of the valid Tŭrnovo constitution; the “people’s prosecutors” were selected based on political criteria, in practice according to their willingness to exercise vengeance; the communist leaders interfered directly with court proceedings and exerted psychological pressure by gathering and instigating crowds outside; the accusations and the verdicts were politically motivated and served political goals; collective responsibility and guilt were presumed; and the verdicts were extremely harsh and affected innocent people. In all, 10,919 persons were brought to trial, of whom 2,618 were sentenced to death (and 1,046 executed), and 1,126 were sentenced to life imprisonment. Names of people who were killed in the lawless months before the start of the People’s Court were included among those sentenced to death in order to give the violence the appearance of legality; hence the above difference between death sentences and executions after the court.¹⁰⁰ The families and relatives of the convicted

gariya pod komunisticheskoto robstvo. Prestŭpleniya, sŭprotiva, represii” (Bulgaria under the communist yoke. Crimes, resistance, repressions), in *Chernata kniga na komunizma* (The black book of communism), ed. Stephane Courtois, part II, *Istoriya i pamet za komunizma v Evropa* (History and memory of communism in Europe) (Sofia: Prosorets, 2004), 293–347, esp. 303–304 (18,000–25,000 killed and disappeared without a trace, but based on extrapolation, not documents).

⁹⁸ Nedyu Nedev, *Milan Drenchev. Ideologiya i borbi* (Milan Drenchev. Ideology and struggles) (Sofia: Izdatelstvo na BZNS “Nikola Petkov,” 1996), 66–67. Nedev gives a figure of 1,700–1,800 persons killed without trial in the months of September, October, and November 1944 and affirms that this is all that can be found in the various sources.

⁹⁹ The Nuremberg Tribunal had twenty-four defendants and issued twelve death sentences; the People’s Courts in the other East European states were also much more restricted. It is no coincidence that the extraordinary tribunal in Bulgaria was carried out hastily before the end of the war, in order to avoid the restraint of Western influence. See a comparison among the various cases in Iskra Baeva, “Smyana na elite i kadrite v Bŭlgariya i Iztocna Evropa, 1944–1948” (A change of the elites and the cadres in Bulgaria and Eastern Europe, 1944–1948), in *Litsa na vremeto* (Faces of the times), vol. 1 (Sofia: Tsentŭr za istoricheski i politologicheski izsledvaniya, 1996), 65–90, esp. 72–75.

¹⁰⁰ Petŭr Semerdzhiev, *Narodniyat sŭd v Bŭlgariya 1944–1945. Komu i zashto e bil neobkhodim?* (The People’s Court in Bulgaria. For whom and why was it necessary?)

persons were also subject to persecutions, in which 11,845 people were interned. The People's Court mainly struck at the former political and administrative elites: the regents, prime ministers, and ministers of the cabinets from January 1, 1941, to September 9, 1944; superior army officers and civil servants; the personnel of the Ministry of the Interior; anti-communist intellectuals; and the Orthodox and Protestant clergy. Most of the elite was physically destroyed.

The People's Court handled only the largest of a multitude of political trials that took place on a central and local level, the number of which is hard to establish. The purpose of all those fabricated trials was to reveal "conspiracies" between army officers (e.g., the organization "Neutral Officer" in January–February 1947, the "Military League") and the political opposition and thus to justify the repressions against them.¹⁰¹ The biggest public, and international, reaction was to the trial of the Agrarian leader (and of the entire opposition) Nikola Petkov, who was sentenced to death (on August 16, 1947) on the instructions of Georgi Dimitrov and hanged.¹⁰² The leader of the Democratic Party, Stoicho Moshanov, and the social democrat Kosta Lulchev were murdered; the old and respected politician Atanas Burov died soon after he was released from prison. But the trials presented only the more visible side of the situation, while simultaneously there were mass purges (in the sense of dismissals) by the thousands in the army and the various branches of the civil service, and the dismissed were replaced mostly by communist cadres without regard to qualifications.

Opinions in Bulgarian historiography on the initial repressions against the former elite remain divided, just as with attitudes toward socialism in general. The repressions, even of innocent people, are not denied even by pro-communist authors, but they are minimized in various ways, and some "justification" is sought that would exonerate the communist leadership. Mito Isusov, for example, rejects claims of an "organized communist ter-

(Sofia: Makedoniya pres, 1997), 406–411. See also Poly Meshkova and Dinyu Sharlanov, *Bŭlgarskata gilotina. Tainite mekhanizmi na Narodniya sŭd* (The Bulgarian guillotine. The secret mechanisms of the People's Court) (Sofia: Agentsiya "Demokratiya," 1994). On the nerve-racking atmosphere around the Court, see the memoirs of Dimitŭr Peshev, *Spomeni* (Memoirs) (Sofia: Gutenberg, 2004), 295–345. Peshev was deputy chair of the National Assembly and led the campaign to rescue the Bulgarian Jews.

¹⁰¹ Dinyu Sharlanov, *Titaniyata*, 16–18, 26, 29–33, 80–92.

¹⁰² Georgi Gunev, *Kŭm brega na svobodata*. The role of Georgi Dimitrov in the execution of Nikola Petkov is seen in Georgi Dimitrov, *Dnevnik*, 565 (telegram from September 17, 1947).

ror” during the initial months and asserts instead that the violence was exercised by criminals and vagabonds without political identification, by soldiers over army officers or as vengeance over civil servants coming back from the “new lands,” between activists of the Macedonian movement, and so on. In order to stop the anarchy, Georgi Dimitrov sent a telegram from Moscow: “we definitively put an end to the revolutionary purge,” while another telegram condemned the arbitrary searches, arrests, and confiscations carried out by former partisans and party members in the role of militiamen. But, says Isusov, all revolutions are violent and take innocent victims.¹⁰³ It is interesting to note in this connection that the very notion of revolution somehow legitimizes the violence (as “revolutionary violence”) and devalues life and the law. This is true to the extent that the revolution itself possesses a romantic aura of something good and valuable in its final goals and ideals, which are supposed to justify the concomitant violence: if we want the final result, we should accept the costs. Conversely, the discrediting of the ideas by the outcome (but also by the means) strips the revolution of its heroic mantle and lays bare and criminalizes the violence.

According to another attempt to excuse the repressions, they present a continuation, by inertia (and as a reaction), of the violence from the preceding wartime period and even of a “civil war” dated 1923 (with the communist September Uprising).¹⁰⁴ To cite one author, the violence continued spontaneously and chaotically after September 9; the inevitable and just retribution went beyond the law and in some cases became a settling of accounts, but this was also the case in France, Italy, and Belgium. Although he evidently regrets such excesses, the same author is quick to add from his ideological and party position that one should not equate the sins of totalitarian socialism (characteristically, he does not say crimes)—great as they are—with the crimes of fascism, because this would mean a vindication and restoration of fascism.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰³ Mito Isusov, “Istoricheskite realnosti v sledvoenna Bŭlgariya” (Historical realities in Bulgaria after the war). In *Stranitsi ot bŭlgarskata istoriya. Sŭbitiya. Razmisli. Lichnosti*. (Pages from Bulgarian history. Events. Reflections. Personalities), vol. 2 (Sofia: Prosveta, 1993), 5–13, esp. 7–8; Mito Isusov, *Politicheskiyat zhivot*, 72–73. On the initial repressions without attempt at justification, see also Lyubomir Ognyanov, *Dŭrzhavno-politicheskata sistema*, 26–28.

¹⁰⁴ For example, Mito Isusov, *Politicheskite realnosti*, 7; Mito Isusov, *Politicheskiyat zhivot*, 72.

¹⁰⁵ Atanas Semerdzhiev, *Prezhivyanoto ne podlezhi na obzhalvane* (The lived-through [experience] cannot be appealed) (Sofia: Hristo Botev, 1999), 462–464.

Those on the other side of the debate contest the thesis of "spontaneity" and argue that the "revolutionary violence" was premeditated and instigated by the communists and their allies from the Fatherland Front in order to intimidate through terror and crush their political opponents. These observers cite various instructions not to hamper the "revolutionary activities" of the masses.¹⁰⁶ From this point of view the above-mentioned telegrams from Moscow only prove the scope of the terror and that it already threatened public order and had become superfluous, not that it was not deliberately provoked and tolerated. Sharlanov also points out that while, during the resistance, most of the communists were killed in action while armed (and many soldiers and policemen were killed by them), most of the victims of communism were simply dragged out of their homes and marched away to their deaths.¹⁰⁷

The wave of repressions reached the communists themselves in the campaign against the "enemy with a party card." It hit higher communist leaders and activists (with impeccable revolutionary pasts), army officers (former partisans), state functionaries, and economic heads of the new regime. As was noted a long time ago: the revolution devours its own children. The Soviet so-called "advisers" (KGB officers) played a sinister role in organizing the persecutions. They placed themselves above the Bulgarian ministers and dominated the Ministry of the Interior (police and interrogation), while the judiciary became powerless. They also introduced the new "scientific" methods of interrogation and torture, the most terrible of which were subjecting arrestees to systematic deprivation of sleep and night interrogations, making them stand upright to the point of complete exhaustion, confinement in narrow spaces, prolonged hunger, and psychological and moral pressure (such as humiliation, lies, and threats against family members). The physical and psychological effect far surpassed that of "traditional" beatings and consisted of extreme debilitation and loss of will, conditioning, and a complete numbness or catalepsy, when death is desired.¹⁰⁸ As confession was considered the main proof of

¹⁰⁶ Dinyu Sharlanov, Lyubomir Ognyanov, and Plamen Tsvetkov, "Bŭlgariya pod komunisticheskoto," 304.

¹⁰⁷ Dinyu Sharlanov, *Tiraniyata*, 10–11. Most extreme is the pamphlet of Hristo Troanski, *Ubiistveno cherveno. Trilŭr hronika* (Deadly red. A thriller-chronicle) (Sofia: Izdatel'sko atelie Ab, 2003).

¹⁰⁸ Striking descriptions of the tortures in Dencho Znepolski, *Posmŭrtna izpoved* (Posthumous confession) (Sofia: Hristo Botev, 1998), 357–380, 402–403. Znepolski was a deputy commander of the famous partisan detachment of Trŭn. Also the memoirs of the commander of this detachment, Slavcho Trŭnski, *Nevŭzmozhni istini* (Impossible

guilt (Vyshinsky's invention), most fantastic confessions were wrested out of the accused in the above-mentioned ways, and people were forced to implicate others in the fabrication of absurd conspiracies for coups d'état, agent ties with Western "imperialists" or with Tito, and even plans to kill Stalin. The major figure brought to trial was Traicho Kostov, leader of the Communist Party during the resistance and second in the party to Georgi Dimitrov. Kostov was singled out by Stalin himself on the pretext of his economic instruction (based on the law on trade secrecy) not to give out information about prices even to Soviet officials.¹⁰⁹ He was accused of anti-Sovietism, proclaimed a foreign agent (more specifically, a Titoist), and tortured and executed (in December 1949). More than 1,000 people, mostly higher state and party functionaries, were repressed in the trial against him and the related trials in 1950–1951. This was the time when the repressive apparatus slipped out of the control of the Bulgarian communist leadership, placed itself above the leadership, and acted on the instructions of the Soviet advisers from the KGB and on its own will, drawing more and more people into imaginary conspiracy webs. Even Politburo members were placed under surveillance until Vŭlko Chervenkov finally asked Stalin to recall the main Soviet adviser (Gen. Filatov). Traicho Kostov and the other people who were tried as his collaborators (known as *traichokostovisti*) were vindicated by the April Plenum in 1956, but not completely, and the survivors were not reinstated. Moreover, those in charge of the trials were not punished, and the causes were not exposed, as this would have endangered the system and exposed the guilt of many then in power (including Zhivkov, who was especially active working against Traicho Kostov). The enemies without a party card would have to wait until 1989 for their rehabilitation.¹¹⁰

The memoirs of prominent communists and victims of the repressions are very interesting in some respects. Apart from the methods of interrogation, they attest to the general psychological atmosphere of those "sick" times—the distrust, suspicion (under the slogan of "revolutionary alert-

truths) (Sofia: Slavika-RM, 1994), 110–111, 128–135. Also the memoirs of Georgi Vasilev, *Ostrov Persin. Pozorŭt na Bŭlgariya* (Persin Island. The disgrace of Bulgaria) (Sofia: Universitetsko izdatelstvo "Sv. Kliment Okhridski," 1995), 62–82, 113–115. Vasilev was a mining engineer, tried in the "trial of the mining engineers."

¹⁰⁹ Mito Isusov, *Poslednata godina na Traicho Kostov* (Traicho Kostov's last year) (Sofia: Hristo Botev, 1990). It describes Stalin singling out Traicho Kostov as an enemy and the role of some Bulgarian Politburo members in persecuting Kostov to the end.

¹¹⁰ The Bulgarian Supreme Court annulled the verdicts of the People's Court (on the king's advisers, ministers, and regents in particular) with a decision on August 26, 1996.

ness" and "purity"), fantasies about conspiracies, ubiquitous search for enemies, and paralyzing fear.¹¹¹ At the same time, they illustrate a boundless faith in the ideal, a cult of the Communist Party, and unconditional discipline and submission. The ideal communist was expected to possess "purity," "principles," "honesty," and "strength of character." The repressions tested precisely the conviction of the "idealists," and one can trace the dramatic struggle between belief and critical thought. They were especially tormented by the fact that they were tortured by their own side (and in a worse way than at the hands of the fascists previously) and that they were forced to make false confessions precisely in the name of the party (to facilitate the capture of enemies) and in the name of the ideal. Depending on their individual circumstances and the time the memoirs were written, the memoirists reach different points in their critical stance and where it is directed—against Stalinism and the particular party leadership, the way the party functioned, or the realities of socialism. But they rarely question the "socialist ideal" of a supposedly most just and most humane social order.¹¹² The psychology of clinging to the idea is strongly expressed in the words of the famous partisan leader Slavcho Trŭnski (persecuted in Traicho Kostov's trials): "one could not part easily with the idea for which we had repeatedly sacrificed ourselves and our loved ones. The theme will never be exhausted because, whatever one says, the motivation of human behavior is unfathomable."¹¹³ This can be interpreted as saying that, having invested in the idea and risked one's most valuable possessions—the prime of one's life, one's energy, belief, and loved ones—it is very hard and even impossible to renounce it.

Historian Gospodinka Nikova makes a persuasive attempt to explain the actual goals of the trials against leading Bulgarian communist functionaries ("cadres") of the party, the state, the economy, and the army, inspired by Moscow. According to her, this represents the most violent (coercive) stage of the process of Sovietization and the buildup of the bloc

¹¹¹ See Niko Yakhiel, *Todor Zhivkov*, 41–48.

¹¹² About the dramatic doubts: Vladimir Topencharov, *Besove na moeto vreme. Kladenetsŭt na spomenite* (Fury of my times. The well of memories) (Sofia: Bulvest-2000, 1993), 39, 66–68, 75–76, 93–94, 108, 133, 324–325, 339, 368; Dencho Znepolski, *Posmŭrtna izpoved*, 360, 448, 462–465, 512–513; Slavcho Trŭnski, *Nevŭzmozhni istini*, 128, 132–133, 156–157, 174; Boris Hristov, *Izpitanieto. Spomeni za protsesa i sŭdbata na Traicho Kostov i negovata grupa* (The ordeal. Memoirs about the trial and the fate of Traicho Kostov and his group) (Sofia: Universitetsko izdatelstvo "Sv. Kliment Okhridski," 1995), 182–187.

¹¹³ Slavcho Trŭnski, *Nevŭzmozhni istini*, 174.

system, the voiding of state sovereignty, and the imposition of the Soviet leadership. Among other things it aimed at destroying any foreign trade autonomy and ensuring Bulgaria's commercial and technological reorientation toward the Soviet Union by eliminating the old experts, educated mainly in Germany and the West. So it happened in actual fact: the Council of Economic and Financial Issues (previously headed by Traicho Kostov) was dissolved, and the economic questions were decided without competence in the Politburo; Soviet specialists were appointed in all economic ministries and became a strong "shadow power" to the official institutions. Furthermore, striking at people of the highest party rank and unquestioned merits had to serve as an example, to instill fear and cut short any critique, especially of the Soviet model and the Soviet leadership.¹¹⁴

The repression also included sending people to "labor-educational [*trudovo-vuzpitatelen*] camps" and labor mobilization as well as internment.¹¹⁵ According to an archival-documentary research, 23,531 persons were sent to forced labor camps (from 1944 to May 8, 1962, when they were closed down), 14,647 for political reasons, and 6,190 for criminal and "immoral" deeds (no data was available for the rest). The camp near Belene on the Danube was biggest (9,933 persons passed through it) and held mainly political inmates; the cruelest was the regime in the camp near Lovech (with predominantly "criminal" inmates). Internment to camps usually occurred without trial or sentence, and some people were put there accidentally and/or for trivial reasons. The number of inmates decreased after the death of Stalin, but the camps were filled once again after the Hungarian "counter-revolution" of 1956.

The camp near Lovech (September 1959–March 1962) deserves special attention because it was the cruelest of the Bulgarian camps and most similar to Stalin's gulag (and because the drawn-out trial over it after 1989 led nowhere, but produced terrifying documents). At least 1,501 persons passed through it; at least 148 persons perished, and the rest survived, with heavy psychological trauma. A relatively small number of those sent there were murdered for political reasons, while most of the inmates were "criminals"

¹¹⁴ Gospodinka Nikova, "Golemiyat zagovor v Bŭlgariya (1949–1953 g.)" (The great conspiracy in Bulgaria, 1949–1953), in *Litsa na vremeto*, vol. 2 (Sofia: Tsentŭr za istoricheski i politologicheski izsledvaniya, 1997), 69–98.

¹¹⁵ Penka Stoyanova and Emil Iliev, *Politicheski opasni litsa. Vŭdvoryavaniya, trudova mobilizatsiya, izselvaniya v Bŭlgariya sled 1944 g.* (Politically dangerous people. Labor camps, labor mobilization, internment in Bulgaria after 1944) (Sofia: Universitetsko izdatelstvo "Sv. Kliment Okhridski," 1991), 39, 55, 64, 68.

or "hooligans" (as the incriminating formula reads) actually sent for quite accidental reasons. However, most important in this case is the degree of sadism and dehumanization of the supervisors and the heads of the "brigades," as well as the brutalization of the victims themselves.¹¹⁶ This is the grotesque of the communist society's "re-educational" project. Putting aside the immediate horrors of the camp, what is most noteworthy is that such a place could exist at all, regardless of how much the Politburo and Zhivkov himself were told about conditions at the camp, which was organized by the sinister figure Mircho Spasov (who was very close to Zhivkov). One can see the end result of the elimination of the law and the judiciary and of the arbitrary rule in the name of whatever goals and ideals; one can also glimpse the extremes of the disciplinary nature of communism.¹¹⁷

A number of memoirs appeared describing life in the camps and especially in the Belene political camp. The memoirs of Stefan Bochev (son of a prominent bourgeois economist and bank manager) stand out for their reflections on various themes (history, politics, nature, people) and their high literary quality, but there are other powerful memoirs as well.¹¹⁸ Also interesting are the memoirs of political émigrés about their lives and the lives of their relatives. A masterpiece of this kind is the autobiography of Stephane Groueff (son of the head of the chancellery of King Boris III, executed by the People's Court) that tells the story of the life of his close relatives in Bulgaria parallel with his own very interesting career in France and the United States.¹¹⁹ The perspective here is fundamentally different from that of the repressed communists in their memoirs, and so is the experience of the world. Finally, these same times are attested to from a different angle in the memoirs of intellectuals critical of the communist regime.¹²⁰

¹¹⁶ See Hristo Hristov, *Sekretnoto delo po lagerite* (The secret lawsuit on the [forced labor] camps) (Sofia: IK "Ivan Vazov," 1999).

¹¹⁷ See the inferences of the examining magistrate in the case on the forced labor camps in Hristo Hristov, *Sekretnoto delo*, 176–177.

¹¹⁸ Stefan Bochev, *Belene. Skazanie za kontslagera Bŭlgariya* (Belene. A saga of Concentration-camp Bulgaria) (Sofia: Fondatsiya "Bŭlgarska nauka i kultura," 1999). Also Nedyalko Geshev, *Belene. Ostrovŭt na zabravenite. Spomeni* (Belene. The island of the forgotten. Memoirs) (Sofia: DF "Robinzon" ATI, 1991). Geshev was an activist for the Agrarian Union. See also memoirs by communists sent to camps: Dencho Znepolski, *Posmŭrtna izpoved*; Georgi Vasilev, *Ostrov Persin*.

¹¹⁹ Stefan Gruev, *Moyata odiseya* (My Odyssey) (Sofia: Obsidian, 2002; in English: Stephane Groueff, *My Odyssey* [IUniverse, 2003]).

¹²⁰ Vera Mutaŭchieva, *Bivalitsi*. (Things past.). *Kniga pŭrva* (Book one) (Sofia: Anubis, 2000), esp. 255–366; *Kniga vtora* (Book two) (Sofia: Anubis, 2001).

Not surprisingly, the repressions are the most traumatic and painful moment in the history of socialism. This is about unearthing and restoring the darkest aspects of the past and the shaping of the memory of socialism. Willingly or not, the historian partakes in this work and cannot avoid taking a clear and unequivocal stand. He/she has to fulfill the work of “struggling to come to terms with” (or mastering) the past (in German: *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*) with the idea that overcoming the past (so that it may not be repeated) includes first knowing it “to the very bottom,” however painful. A therapeutic effect is expected both in the psychoanalytical sense of raising the repressed and displaced to clear consciousness, so that it may not recur as a pathological symptom, and in the ordinary sense of knowledge, so that an informed person of common sense should not defend such a system. This is especially true as this was not an aberration of the communist system, but its inception and crystallization in a pure form.

The Bulgarian sociologist Georgi Fotev is the author of a book intended as a moral condemnation of the “long night” of communism.¹²¹ The basic idea of this “surrealistic sociology” (as Fotev calls it) is to unmask and “unpack” life under socialism by juxtaposing the façade and the language of the official propaganda with what was actually happening and the “experienced” reality in an attempt at “correcting names” (i.e., naming things as they really were). The repressiveness of the regime takes center stage: the terror, spontaneous and state-sponsored; the interrogations and tortures; the camps; the banishment of the families of the repressed and the stigmatization of relatives, even distant ones; the sinister “panoptic” omnipresence of State Security, which instilled fear in each and every person; and the way in which the whole country came to resemble a concentration camp. On the façade side are the stupid enthusiasm of the masses—“a grandiose and strange theatricality” of social life, the eulogies and ravings about the shining future, cults of idols (of leaders and the party), mass conformism, and the “life in a lie” of the intelligentsia. The appeal is against such a system and life world in the name of humaneness.

Despite everything, communism in Bulgaria was not decisively condemned (at least in my observation), not even compared to the preceding regime, which remains tarnished by fascism. This is so despite the fact that the repressiveness of communism was stronger, longer, and more systematic than that of the preceding regime. There are various reasons for

¹²¹ Georgi Fotev, *Dŭlgata nosht na komunizma v Bŭlgariya* (The long night of communism in Bulgaria) (Sofia: Iztok-Zapad, 2008).

that. To name a few, the communist repressions date from the first post-war decade or so and receded into distance with the passing of time. The last decades of the regime were comparatively calm and without political violence (except for the anti-Turkish campaign). No less important is that over time, the regime struck deep roots in society and tied too many people to itself one way or another. And there is—for older people—the sheer weight of a life lived in the familiar socialist conditions with no alternative, which they do not want to see as a failure ("negated," as the socialist post-1989 propaganda had it). These people, too (like the ones who suffered), have the right to a voice in making sense of the life they lived, of the bad in it, but also of the good, and of the experience and wisdom they have derived.¹²² In addition, the prolonged worsening of the economic situation for the vast majority, the political corruption, and the rampant, unpunished criminality after communism in Bulgaria fostered in many people, losers in the transition, at least for a time, a nostalgia for socialism that made its condemnation all the more difficult.

Bulgarian Totalitarianism

The socialist narrative coyly characterizes the dark era of the "cult of personality" of Vŭlko Chervenkov (1948–1953) as entailing some "mistakes," "distortions" of collective leadership, "voluntarism," violations of the Leninist norms of party life and public life, and the like, all this successfully overcome at the April Plenum of 1956. The reassessment makes use of an altogether different conceptual apparatus: imposition of the Stalinist (totalitarian) model of socialism, administrative command system, and so on. The attempts to idealize the image of Georgi Dimitrov and to blame the cult of personality entirely on Vŭlko Chervenkov are rejected. The very concept of a cult of personality is rejected as too perfunctory and also because it leaves the impression that, aside from this distortion, socialism is otherwise fine and remediable.¹²³

For the historian Vladimir Migeŭ, the period of the "cult" represents the fullest embodiment of the Stalinist model of socialism in Bulgaria. But

¹²² For example the quite different "life stories" in socialism: Daniela Koleva, ed., *Vŭrkhu hrastite ne padat mŭlnii. Komunizmŭt—zhiteiski sudbi* (The bushes do not attract thunderbolts. Communism—life destinies) (Sofia: Institut za izsledvane na blizkoto minalo, 2007).

¹²³ Vladimir Migeŭ, "Po vŭprosa za ustanovyavaneto," 29–31.

a number of prerequisites for the assertion of this model were formed in the preceding period, such as the enormous growth of the Communist Party and “revolutionary extremism” of a great part of its membership, the building of a variety of mass organizations under its guidance (youth, professional, women’s and other unions), nationalization, ban of the oppositional parties and transformation of the Fatherland Front into a non-party mass organization. Still, Stalinism in Bulgaria was far milder than the original. Repression was incomparably weaker than in the Soviet Union; there were no campaigns against the richer peasants (“kulaks”) and no binding of the peasants to collective farms (*kolkhozi*); the political climate was milder and certain (unofficial) opposition attitudes were tolerated.¹²⁴ It should be stressed that in this understanding the Stalinist (totalitarian) model was not imposed suddenly, but gradually and at different times in the various domains. Furthermore, this process does not presuppose a sharp division between “people’s democracy” and the “cult of personality,” but spans both periods. There was continuity in the building of the totalitarian system in Bulgaria.

The socialist transformation in the educational sphere is treated in a monograph by Vesela Chichovska—one of the best studies of the early socialist era.¹²⁵ Chichovska documents and analyzes the various mechanisms for penetration and gaining control of the school system, the university, and the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences by the Communist Party and how, in spite of seeming compromises with the allies (who became complicit willy-nilly), the party methodically and inexorably pursued the strategic goal of transforming this ideologically important sphere. The successfully applied tactics and moves included acting through the National Committee of the Fatherland Front, the vesting of administrative powers with the purely consultative Educational Council to the Ministry (when it was taken over by communists), the creation of a position of deputy minister (and appointing a communist to it) to counteract the professional “chief secretary,” creation under communist aegis of a new professional organization

¹²⁴ Vladimir Migeв, “Utvürzhdavane i razgrüshtane na stalinistkiya model na sotsializma v Bŭlgariya (1948–1953)” (Consolidation and deployment of the Stalinist model in Bulgaria, 1948–1953). In *Stranitsi ot bŭlgarskata istoriya*, Vol. 2, 54–70.

¹²⁵ Vesela Chichovska, *Politikata sreshu prosvetnata traditsiya* (Politics against educational tradition) (Sofia: Universitetsko izdatelstvo “Sv. Kliment Okhridski,” 1995). See also the recently published monograph by Pepka Boyadzhieva: *Sotsialnoto inzhenerstvo* (Social engineering) (Sofia: Institut za izsledvane na blizkoto minalo, Ciela, 2010). This is a detailed study of communist admission policies to higher education and of higher education itself.

comprising all "educational workers" from academicians to teachers in order to weaken the old professional organizations, and finally, exerting pressure on and taking direct control of the Ministry of Education. On a personal level the communist tactics consisted of singling out, isolating, and attacking some people while praising others; and inciting pupils against their teachers, teachers against headmasters, students against their lecturers, and assistant professors against professors; exploiting personal enmities in the academic milieu; and making use of slander and denunciations.

Ideologically the socialist transformation of the educational sphere took place in the name of de-fascization and democratization, as well as against "Great Bulgarian chauvinism," even though the majority of people affected by such measures had nothing to do with the allegations and accusations. The label "fascist" in particular was used and misused most arbitrarily and irresponsibly against all recalcitrant and independent-minded persons.¹²⁶ The slogan of democratization became a disguise for lowering the requirements for teachers and lecturers' qualifications, weakening discipline, undermining the prestige of schoolteachers, and abolishing the autonomy of the universities and the Academy of Sciences (where the most popular professors were transferred to isolate them from the student audiences). On the whole professionalism gave way to political loyalty, and scholarly neutrality and tolerance in the presentation of various theories and opinions was replaced by an ideologized, simplified, and unified education and instruction in the spirit of the socialist dogmas with the goal of preparing a "new intelligentsia" that would be loyal to the regime above all else.

The forcible transformation of the Bulgarian "bourgeois" (especially urban) society into a socialist one is treated in a large-scale social history by Dimitŭr Ludzhev.¹²⁷ Ludzhev traces the dramatic changes in the status and the life of the big (financial, commercial, industrial) bourgeoisie, of the petty bourgeoisie with its multiple and hybrid occupations, of the workers, and of the bourgeois intelligentsia in the liberal professions and the arts. Especially tragic was the fate of the big bourgeoisie (destroyed as a class and, in part, physically as well) and of groups of the old bourgeois intelligentsia, whose material existence was shattered (especially the lib-

¹²⁶ On the manipulation of the concept of "defascization" and "democratization" in the educational sphere in order to eliminate the old intellectual elite and for fostering a new loyal and indoctrinated intelligentsia, Vesela Chichovska, *Politikata sreshtu prosvetnata*, 35, 49, 60, 62, 67, 68–70, 74, 98–128, 291–292, 316–322, 350–352, 417–418.

¹²⁷ Dimitŭr Ludzhev, *Grad na dve epokhi*.

eral professions with a private clientele¹²⁸). But the self-employed artisans and retail traders, as well as the people in various services, also faced enormous hardships and difficulties as their livelihood was taken away from them and they were transformed into workers and petty clerks in the nationalized factories and enterprises. After the short revolutionary disorder, the old and the new working class hardly fared better—gathered in the sites of construction and industrialization under worsened conditions of life and no less exploitation by the state.¹²⁹ Empirically based and well-argued works like those mentioned above are very useful in revealing the actual contents of the period and its real characteristics. The processes of the socialist transformation of the political, economic, social, and cultural sphere, so proudly announced previously and described in empty ideological terms, come down to exactly such realities.

On the basis of vast archival material, Vladimir Migeв studied, on a large scale, the collectivization of the Bulgarian village (1948–1958). It took place in several stages (and some shock actions) with some interruptions and a long period of “relaxation” between the two major stages, 1948–1953 and 1956–1958. In Bulgaria, as in the Soviet Union (in contrast to most countries in Eastern Europe), the collectivization was very thorough, but in Bulgaria the private property of the land in the TKZS (Labor Cooperative Agricultural Farms) was initially preserved in theory in the form of rent (later abolished). Migeв reaches the following general conclusions: in spite of separate punitive actions, there was no mass campaign against the richer peasants (“kulaks”) in Bulgaria, which considerably softened the process of collectivization; compulsory grain deliveries were less severe than in the Soviet Union; the driving force of the collectivization was the poorer peasants, who expected radical changes in their favor; finally, the “respite” from the summer of 1953 to 1956 gave the private smallholders the possibility either to accept the collectivization or to convert their resources to assets not subject to expropriation and then, in some cases, to leave the agricultural sector (“voting with one’s feet against socialism in the village”). In spite of its milder character, collectivization in Bulgaria exerted a harmful influence upon the development of agriculture and animal breeding.¹³⁰

¹²⁸ Ibid., 447–666.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 670.

¹³⁰ Vladimir Migeв, *Kolektivizatsiyata na bŭlgarskoto selo, 1948–1958* (The collectivization of the Bulgarian village, 1948–1958) (Sofia: Universitetsko izdatelstvo “Stopanstvo,” 1995), esp. 288–298; Vladimir Migeв, “Kolektivizatsiyata na selskoto stopanstvo v Bŭlgariya (1948–1958). Tipologiya, etapi, problemi” (The collectivization of agricul-

The research on collectivization was recently continued in a fruitful way by Mikhail Gruev, who studied the situation in northwestern Bulgaria based on archival materials but also through ethnographic methods (interviews, oral histories, etc.).¹³¹ The various forms of "squeezing the peasant" and the pressure for collectivization are described: confiscating the agricultural machines; unequal "exchanges" (of better land for poorer land for those outside the cooperative farms); sizable obligatory deliveries to the state, including on barren cows and oxen; impossible exigencies for land under cultivation; heavy taxes and low purchase prices; a ration system; sending groups to the villages to harass the peasants psychologically and physically; ostracizing well-to-do peasants branded as "kulaks"; and banishment. Also revealed are the forms and strategies of peasant resistance (in this case with some peculiarities because of the proximity to the border with Yugoslavia), such as hiding grain, leaving the cooperatives, escaping over the border, kin solidarity, putting the poor peasants and the women at the front of the protests (as less vulnerable), and even curses and religious belief in retribution for the sins of the communist activists. Gruev questions the accepted view about the readiness of the poor peasants to enter the cooperatives. Finally, he traces the slow, painful, and contradictory process of adaptation to the new conditions of life that also brought about modernizing changes, such as tractors and electrification. The strategies of adaptation and concomitant phenomena are analyzed, such as migration to the cities, leading to the cities' rustification and the emergence of a new "hybrid" type of urban dweller; the mobilization of kin and family ties in the so-called "second networks" of exchange and mutual help; the development of a "culture of theft" of state property; intensive work on the small patches of land for private use; and the formation of a nomenklatura of heads of the cooperative farms.

The so-called "cultural revolution" (in the narrow sense) of socialism also became subject to reassessment, including its impact on the arts and literature and upon the fate of some creative personalities. The communist regime in Bulgaria was especially sensitive toward the cultural sphere and kept a close watch on the so-called artistic-creative intelligentsia, first,

ture in Bulgaria, 1948–1958. Typology, stages, problems), *Istoricheski pregled* 50/51, no. 4 (1994–1995): 53–83.

¹³¹ Mikhail Gruev, *Preorani slogove. Kolektivizatsiya i sotsialna promyana v Bŭlgarskiya severozapad, 40-te–50-te godini na XX vek* (Plowed boundary strips. Collectivization and social change in the Bulgarian northwest, the 1940s and 1950s). (Sofia: Institut za izsledvane na blizkoto minalo, Institut "Otvoreno obshtestvo," Ciela, 2009).

because of the use of art for propaganda and education, second, for reasons of prestige, and third, in order to curb the propensity of creative people for independent thinking and free expression. The authorities' attitude toward literature and the arts varied greatly from the militant "socialist realism" of the initial times to acceptance or at least tolerance of other tendencies and styles. According to Vladimir Migeu this was a good indicator of the changes of the regime itself, attesting to a general liberalizing tendency punctuated by several clampdowns conditioned by external events. Contrary to the heroic (or victimized) self-image of many creative personalities and of the creative intelligentsia in general, this author reveals a variety of stances vis-à-vis the authorities (even by one individual), in which the critical role is an exception and conformism the rule.¹³² The art historian Dimităr Avramov assesses the "April thaw" in the arts in particular (after the April plenum of 1956) as an "insidious maneuver" and a "hypocritical mimicry" on the part of the authorities, but also a game in which the intelligentsia and the Communist Party "tried to outwit each other."¹³³

The prolonged de-Stalinization in Bulgaria (1953–1956), which ended with the April plenum in 1956, praised by the regime as the beginning of a renewal ("April Spring," "April Line") under the guidance of Todor Zhivkov, attracted special attention after 1989. As some authors showed, after a reluctant reorientation toward Moscow, the April "thaw" proved to be brittle and short-lived. The emerging critiques (which Zhivkov called a "petty bourgeois confusion on the rise" and a "murkiness") were soon stifled by warnings and punishments to tighten discipline, while the institutional changes barely scratched the surface.¹³⁴ The events in Hungary in 1956 served as a convenient pretext for freezing the processes of liberalization and asserting the monolithic "unity" of the party. The camps were filled up for a time with "Hungarians," as the Bulgarians interned on this occasion were called (the irony being that most of them had not even expressed sympathy with the Hungarian Revolution), while 1958 marks the beginning of measures against the "hooligans" (and the creation of the sinister Lovech camp).

¹³² Vladimir Migeu, *Bŭlgarskite pisateli i politicheskiyat zhivot v Bŭlgariya 1944–1970* (Bulgarian writers and political life in Bulgaria, 1944–1970) (Sofia: IK Kota, 2001), esp. 276–278.

¹³³ Dimităr Avramov, *Letopis na edno dramatichno desetiletie. Bŭlgarskoto izkustvo mezhdu 1955–1965* (Chronicle of one dramatic decade. Bulgarian art between 1955 and 1965) (Sofia: Nauka i izkustvo, 1994), in the afterword.

¹³⁴ Vladimir Migeu, "Nesŭstoyalata se 'Aprilska prolet' v Bŭlgariya—1956 g." (The unfilled "April Spring" in Bulgaria, 1956). *Istoricheski pregled* 49, no. 4–5 (1993): 76–88.

The Zhivkov Era and Descriptions of the System

The subsequent development is associated with Todor Zhivkov's personal rule (1953–1989). Though he became secretary general of the Communist Party in 1953, he assumed actual control of power after the April plenum of 1956, and the consolidation of his position lasted until 1962, when he managed to remove the last of the previous power-holders who could challenge his power—Anton Yugov. Zhivkov's political career and policies are the subject of several biographies, and he also left behind his memoirs.¹³⁵ Zhivkov—also known as "Number 1"—and the system are described vividly and with firsthand experience by his collaborators (from his personal office, the so-called "cabinet") Kostadin Chakurov and (especially well by) Niko Yakhiel. Those who worked for Todor Zhivkov express a remarkable consensus about his qualities: good natural abilities, intelligence, and phenomenal memory (though he had no university education, he had rich practical experience); dynamism and energy, quick reaction and ability to connect things; capability to work hard and great efficiency; a prepossessing behavior and a talent to communicate with people; and a modest lifestyle, not coveting money or property. His political qualities include a stubborn drive toward power and a strong feeling and intuition for politics (he was a politician "by nature"); superb mastery of the struggle for power and the art of Machiavellianism; intolerance of rivals or bright personalities around him (he periodically replaced people in high positions who gained authority of their own or made autonomous gestures, but he did so without repression and with remuneration, such as a prestigious job or a pension); pragmatism, not dogmatism; and a good sense of diplomacy, including with foreign heads of state and politicians.¹³⁶ In a negative light the same qualities are often viewed thus: cunning; demagoguery with populist methods; distrust and resentment; perfidy and ruthlessness, when he saw a threat to his personal authority (though he did not destroy people physically, but politically).¹³⁷ But it should be noted that as he worked his way up in the grim Stalinist era,

¹³⁵ Iliyana Marcheva, *Todor Zhivkov*; Iskra Baeva, *Todor Zhivkov* (Sofia: KAMA, 2006). Also Boyan Kastelov, *Todor Zhivkov—mit i istina* (Todor Zhivkov—myth and truth) (Sofia: "Trud," 2005). See also Todor Zhivkov, *Memoari* (Memoirs) (Sofia: SIV, 1997).

¹³⁶ Kostadin Chakurov, *Vtoriyat etazh* (The second floor) (Sofia, 1990), esp. 86–87, 94–103; Niko Yakhiel, *Todor Zhivkov*, 35, 78–79, 413–416, 434–435.

¹³⁷ Niko Yakhiel, *Todor Zhivkov*, 424, 435. Strongly negative about Zhivkov: Vladimir Topencharov, *Besove na moeto*, 368–385.

Zhivkov showed no scruples in dealing with his political rivals and was very active in accusations and persecutions (of Traicho Kostov, Titko Chernokolev, and the talented painter Aleksandŭr Zhendov); besides, the forced-labor camps remained in operation in the first years of his rule.

To hold onto power, Zhivkov had to have good relations with the Soviet leaders. He actually succeeded in being on good terms with Nikita Khrushchev, and his relations with Brezhnev were particularly close and even cordial, to the extent that he could extract some advantages for the country (deliveries of oil and other raw materials at lower prices). But he was not on good terms with Gorbachev and did not approve of Soviet perestroika (especially the political reforms). With an unerring instinct he made sure that nobody mediated his relations with Moscow and cut short any such attempts. But his proposal that Bulgaria should become a “sixteenth republic” of the Soviet Union was a bluff to demonstrate his loyalty, as he knew very well that this would not be accepted.¹³⁸ The other prop of Zhivkov’s power was the apparatus of State Security, which was personally responsible to him; in addition, he created a special department of State Security to keep watch on the people at the top.

Characteristic of Zhivkov was a continuous ideological “creation” and the promotion of new ideas, “theses,” “concepts,” and reform measures. This work was carried out on his instructions and under his control by the people in his personal “cabinet” as well as by various working groups of specialists. However, everything appeared under the name of Zhivkov, who was quite jealous about authorship and the originality of others. He was especially interested in the scientific-technical revolution, in which he believed somewhat blindly, possibly as a key to the elusive economic progress (and he let himself be misled by charlatan scholars); what resulted from this interest was the development of electronics and robotics in Bulgaria.¹³⁹

The assertion of Zhivkov’s personal authority is the main line of the analytical and reflective work by a member of his personal “cabinet,” Niko Yakhiel. He traces it from its difficult and contested beginning until its apogee in the beginning of the 1970s (the Tenth Congress of 1971, when a new party program and a new constitution were adopted), then

¹³⁸ Kostadin Chakurov, *Vtoriyat etazh*, 115–117, 124–131.

¹³⁹ Kostadin Chakurov, *Vtoriyat etazh*, 98, 198–199; Niko Yakhiel, *Todor Zhivkov*, 154–157, 302–303, 338–339, 424–425. In this sense also Gospodinka Nikova, “Zhivkovata ikonomicheska reforma, perestroikata i startŭt na skritata privatizatsiya v Bŭlgariya” (Zhivkov’s economic reform, perestroika, and the start of the hidden privatization in Bulgaria), *Istoricheski pregled* 59, no. 5–6 (2003): 92–125, esp. 123–124.

through the growing perception of the need for radical reforms around 1985 and the erosion of his authority with the deterioration of the economic situation and under the impact of Soviet perestroika on the thinking of Bulgaria's younger generations. Zhivkov's personal authority is presented against the background of the totalitarian system (the Stalinist model) that was installed before him and whose leverages and mechanisms he used in consolidating his power. Here the defining features of the totalitarian system are the administrative command mechanism, a monopoly of the Communist Party over power and the state, the monopoly of Marxist-Leninist ideology, duplication of the state institutions by the Communist Party and merging party and state (a "party-state"), the subordination of the repressive organs directly to the secretary general, and the creation of a political police (Department Six in State Security).

Certain paternalistic and patriarchal elements of Zhivkov's personal authority at its apogee and with his aging are also noted. Within Bulgarian society, absorbed as it was by the effort of coping with everyday life and material hardships, non-civic attitudes developed: people placed on "Tato" (i.e., Father, a moniker with connotations both ironic and affectionate) their hopes for something better, for imposing order and curbing the bureaucrats, and coping with the irregularities of the supply of goods and the housing crisis. Likewise, some were convinced that the people around Zhivkov were misleading him, and some citizens made efforts to reach him personally in trying to solve some issue.¹⁴⁰

According to Niko Yakhiel, once established, the totalitarian system did not evolve substantially until the end, in spite of some cosmetic changes. Liberalization after the April plenum did not mean democratization (and not even an end to the extreme forms of coercion); the reorganization in 1985–1989 without a change of the leader could amount to a change in words only. As this author shows, based not least on his own one-time illusions, the real reform of the system was beyond the political and social imagination of the ruling circles. Nobody could imagine socialism without the leading role of the Communist Party, while democratization would lead to a loss of power by it and its elite. On the other hand, the monopoly of power inevitably produces "distortions" and "cults" of the person at the top.¹⁴¹

¹⁴⁰ Niko Yakhiel, *Todor Zhivkov*, 281–282.

¹⁴¹ On the personal rule (*lichna vlast*) of Zhivkov and Bulgarian totalitarianism, Niko Yakhiel, *Todor Zhivkov*, 48–53, 66–78, 89–97, 148–151, 157, 162–163, 198–201, 228, 234–244, 280–283, 300–305, 338–341, 394–405.

The treatment of socialism as a totalitarian system is accompanied in some cases by a comparison with fascism. Kiril Vasilev cites the following differences between the two versions of totalitarianism (Nazi and Soviet or Bolshevik-Stalinist): unlike the Soviet regime the Nazi dictatorship did not abolish capitalism and did not nationalize private property, but exploited them for its own ends. Nazism is more vulgarly frank and straightforward in its ideology and politics, including the emphasis on one-person rule and the propaganda of war and racism. Socialist totalitarianism is not so sincere: it masks violence and coercion behind a noble and humane phraseology and its aggressive imperial politics behind slogans of peaceful coexistence; it misuses socialist ideas of equality and social justice to manipulate the people; and it hides its vulgar autocracy by praising the role of the masses in history. Such descriptions may be commonplace, but one should bear in mind that Vasilev went from the partisan resistance in his youth to a disappointment with the system and participation in one of the informal “dissident” associations (the “Club for Glasnost and Perestroika”) toward the end of communism.

Vasilev lists the following peculiarities of Bulgarian totalitarianism (particularly compared to the Czech, Hungarian, and Polish variants): it depended entirely on the Soviet Union and showed “Orthodox” loyalty to it, while the Bulgarian Communist Party was especially close to the Communist Party of the Soviet Union; it demonstrated great stability and existed without internal conflict, possibly because the Bulgarian Communist Party had greater influence over the society than other such parties elsewhere; the adaptation and subservience of almost the whole intelligentsia to the system and the absence of a more serious and mass opposition; and Zhivkov’s efforts to create a sort of socialist dynasty (facilitated by resilient traditions of servility and monarchism). According to Vasilev, Zhivkov was an unscrupulous, sly, and uncultured politician who was able to make a remarkable career in Bulgaria through manipulation, demagoguery, and his prodigious energy applied to the fertile soil of underdeveloped civic society. Bulgarian totalitarianism as an “absolutist” political dictatorship ended with the coup d’état on November 10, 1989.¹⁴² These are, of course, excessive and emotionally colored assessments, but they are quoted here as a sample of the range of opinions on the former system before we turn to more scholarly works. Additionally, the peculiarities and emphases of the descriptions of the system matter more for our purposes than the general traits.

¹⁴² Kiril Vasilev, “Intervyu” (Interview), in *Istoritsite za istinata*, 23–51, esp. 32–38.

Eastern socialism was seen as totalitarian from an entirely different—neo-Leninist—perspective by the sociologist Stoyan Mikhailov, who was for a time in the higher echelons of power (before falling into disgrace) and even passed as a reformer. His view amounts to the following: Stalinist totalitarianism was unquestionably evil, and even if it led to a certain modernization, it proved incapable of securing more advanced development. It represents an aberration of socialism and a betrayal of the ideas of Lenin. The Chinese version of Stalinism was Maoism, and the Bulgarian version was Chervenkovism and, in a milder and modified form, Zhivkovism. However, socialism could be successfully reformed, as demonstrated by Lenin's New Economic Policy. The proper model of reform in contemporary conditions is supplied by the Chinese case of a transition from totalitarian socialism (by implication—to true socialism) through gradual economic reform while keeping the Communist Party's monopoly on power and a strong state. Gorbachev's perestroika was a huge mistake, and so was the Bulgarian reform that followed the same model, because they led to the fall of socialism and the restoration of capitalism of the crudest type and the plunder of the national wealth. This author's ideal obviously is state socialism with a Communist Party power monopoly, and a restricted and controlled market, with property either entirely or predominantly held by the state.¹⁴³

Mito Isusov, who was mentioned more than once as the foremost historian of socialism before 1989, gives a truthful (if somewhat banal) description of totalitarian "Stalinist socialism" (or "state socialism"). This system includes the following features: state (and cooperative) property as the economic basis of society, distortions in the economy from giving priority to the "production of means of production"; social structure (after nationalization and forced collectivization) consisting of workers, peasants in cooperatives and intelligentsia; transformation of Marxism from science into the ideology and political doctrine of the Communist Party; merger of the Communist Party with the state; party monopoly over power; a centralized administrative system with a nomenklatura apparatus; Führer practices; political tutelage of culture (called "social realism"); estrangement from the "intransient values of world civilization"; restriction of personal rights and freedoms (hypocritically called "socialist democracy"); paralyzing fear for one's life and one's family; and deterioration of morals. But without explanation,

¹⁴³ Stoyan Mikhailov, *Stalinistkiyat totalitarizŭm* (Stalinist totalitarianism) (Sofia: M-8-M, 2000), 308–395.

Isusov defines the regimes of Chervenkov and Zhivkov as “malignantly” authoritarian.¹⁴⁴

An attempt to conceptualize Bulgarian socialism in its development is offered by Vladimir Migevev.¹⁴⁵ Migevev presents it as an evolution from a Stalinist totalitarian system to an authoritarian regime in the course of the 1960s. The building of some features of the totalitarian system began during the “people’s democracy,” and its consolidation as a system began in the autumn of 1947. It existed in a “pure” form until the summer of 1953 and later on with a certain liberalization of the model: the typical tendency to mete out long prison sentences was softened, and camps were closed down (they were reopened for a short time after 1956). Further liberalization happened after the April (1956) plenum, but there was new repression after the events in Hungary (end of October–November 1956). The Stalinist model is characterized by the abolition of private property in the means of production, the monopoly of the Communist Party over the government, centralized management of the economy, domination of communist ideology over intellectual life without allowing for deviations, excessive bureaucratization of all social structures, egalitarianism in distribution, and deprioritizing the satisfaction of social needs. In the beginning of the 1960s, a gradual evolution began towards an authoritarian model as a general tendency that found expression in waves of “liberalization” (the first one after the Twenty-second Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in October 1961), followed by “stagnation” or “backlashes” (albeit increasingly weak ones) and clampdowns for internal or external reasons (in 1963–1964 and especially 1968–1970, after the Prague Spring). The process was completed with the so-called July Concept of 1987, which delineated the contours of an authoritarian political system. Migevev describes the resulting authoritarian model thus: less centralized

¹⁴⁴ Mito Isusov, *Poslednata godina*, esp. 147–149.

¹⁴⁵ Vladimir Migevev, “Bŭlgariya po vreme na komunisticheskiya rezhim (1946–1989)” (Bulgaria during the communist regime, 1946–1989), *Istoricheski pregled* 58, no. 1–2 (2002): 137–157; Vladimir Migevev, “Za haraktera i oblika na komunisticheskiya rezhim v Bŭlgariya (1944–1989 g.).” (On the character and the outlook of the communist regime in Bulgaria, 1944–1989), in *Bŭlgaria sled 1944—istoriya, problemi, tendentsii* (Bulgaria after 1944—history, problems, tendencies), ed. Stoyan Tanev and Vladimir Migevev (Shumen: Antos, 2002), 13–18; Vladimir Migevev, *Izuchavaneto na perioda 60-te—80-te godini na XX vek ot istoriyata na Bŭlgariya* (The study of the 1960s to the 1980s in the history of Bulgaria), in *Predizvikatelstvata na promyanata* (The challenges of the change), ed. Iskra Baeva and Plamen Mitev (Sofia: Universitetsko izdatelstvo “Sv. Kliment Okhridski,” 2006), 276–288.

management of the economy and limiting the scope of the administrative mechanisms in general; increase of the private sector of the economy; decreased political mobilization and weakened efficiency of official ideology and propaganda; and a certain intellectual pluralism (and diversions from the dogma of the socialist realism in the cultural sphere). Still, as Migevev points out, the main component of totalitarianism in the political sphere—the complete domination of the Communist Party—remained in force until the very end of the regime. Somewhat curiously, Migevev notes "features of a monarchical regime" in the long-term one-person rule of Zhivkov. In short: it was a transformation of the system from totalitarian into authoritarian with one-person rule throughout.

Political philosopher Vasil Prodanov¹⁴⁶ utterly rejects "totalitarianism" as an accurate description of the political system in postwar Bulgaria (and Eastern Europe) before 1989. His arguments are that the notion is inadequate from a theoretical point of view (because one or more of its "classical" features can be detected in very different societies) and that it is an ideological tool from the Cold War, not a scholarly concept. Prodanov particularly objects to placing fascism and communism under the same general category of "totalitarianism" when they were so different in terms of ideology and attitudes toward property. According to him, a better analogy can be made between fascism and liberal democracy, which are similar in their property basis (private property), and it is no coincidence that when the established order and private property are under threat, the bourgeoisie takes recourse to authoritarian and fascist regimes in their defense.

Prodanov, for his part, suggests the term "state socialism" as theoretically more adequate. He defines it as a single-party system in which the party fulfills the functions both of a state and of economic management (of great enterprises). Thus it compensates for the underdevelopment of the market, whose stimuli and functioning under socialism were reduced. While in market societies social integration is achieved through the market and the state, in socialist societies with underdeveloped markets it is achieved by the party and the state. The party uses ideology not only to legitimate the system but also to compensate for the weak market stimuli. The Communist Party is the key modernizing force here, by becoming a state party and part of the

¹⁴⁶ Vasil Prodanov, "Ponyatiето za totalitarizъм e destruktivna ideologema" (The concept of totalitarianism is a destructive ideologem), *Novo vreme* 77, no. 11 (2002): 96–127, esp. 109–120, 127.

mechanism of the state. In states with “real existing socialism,” the degree of etatization is highest (higher than in the social Keynesian state) and also includes the property, resulting in a “directive-plan” economy and a “total protection of man by the state.” This stronger role of the state is presupposed by the backwardness and the need to catch up with the more advanced Western states.

Without commenting on this author’s concept of “totalitarianism,” one can easily see that his “state socialism” is no less value-charged and also presents an ideological weapon (for a very dubious cause). Not only does he neglect to mention the basic negative traits of the socialist system, but he attempts to justify the party-state as a modernizing force, given the country’s backwardness. Curiously enough, the underdeveloped market and the lack of market stimuli are seen not as the result of state socialism, but as a pre-existing condition that made its elaboration imperative. Leaving aside this peculiar use, the concept of “state socialism” (and “party-state”), if properly formulated, can, of course, be used as a suitable instrument for characterizing the system or some of its aspects. An example is provided by Iskra Baeva, who describes “state socialism” by pointing to the lack of freedom in politics, the economy, and culture, all of which make it into a “non-European” (i.e., non-Western) kind of socialism. Apart from that, the type of modernization pursued by state socialism is quite peculiar: implemented by the state from “above” with coercion (including the forced transfer of labor from agriculture to the industries), eliminating private initiative, and unsuccessful in the end in securing higher living standards, it showed achievement only in the educational sphere.¹⁴⁷

Ivaylo Znepolski is the author of an interesting and ambitious attempt to think through the Bulgarian socialist regime in its evolution—what it meant and how it functioned.¹⁴⁸ He goes into the socio-psychological and sociocultural aspects and mechanisms of the regime and applies some theoretical constructions. The initial Stalinist period is characterized by lawlessness, political repressions, and the coercive mobilization (also called “orchestration”) of the masses. The driving force of the transformation was a Bolshevik-type Communist Party, disciplined and trained in extra-legal

¹⁴⁷ Iskra Baeva, “Evropeisko i neevropeisko v iztochno-evropeiskiya sotsializŭm. Bŭlgarskiyat sluchai” (European and non-European in East European socialism. The Bulgarian case), *Istoricheski pregled* 56, no. 5–6 (2000), 72–90, esp. 82–89.

¹⁴⁸ Ivailo Znepolski, *Bŭlgarskiyat komunizŭm*. Znepolski is director of the Institute for the Study of the Recent Past, under whose auspices a vast project to study Bulgarian communism was carried out.

violent action. An unprecedented radical replacement of the old elites by new, undereducated, but ideologically inspired cadres was carried out. Yet not everything was violence and coercion. The masses and especially the lower social strata were also being seduced and "roused to enthusiasm" by exploiting the leftist myth of a socially just society, the egalitarian attitudes and social frustrations, and by contesting the established hierarchies and inciting social envy and social revenge. Also at work was the mechanism of "social mimesis," i.e., passive adaptation, resignation, and mass conformity; within the Communist Party itself, members split into pragmatists (and cynics) and idealists. This was totalitarianism, but softened by its very derivative and secondary nature (a watered-down version of the Soviet model) and also by the everyday life in a small society entangled in kinship relations and other personal ties. In the 1960s a consensus formed in Bulgarian society around the norms and the ways of the regime, and its legitimacy was accepted in return for discontinuing the excessive mobilization and repressions while "seducing" and "buying off" the masses through social policies of redistribution and increased attention to consumption (like the Hungarian "goulash socialism"). The idealists' illusions faded, cynicism and careerism increased, and the party bureaucracy grew. With the change of generations, technocrats and managers got the upper hand within the ruling elites. A process of de-ideologization was underway, and niches were formed within society. The consensus was veiled behind terms such as "socialist way of life" and "all-people's state," while the term "real existing socialism" marked the removal of the utopian dimension of socialism, which generated overly high expectations and was for that reason dangerous. The Brezhnevist "suspension of time" (*bezvremie*) set in. The 1980s witnessed an erosion of consensus because of the economic crisis, the events in Poland, and especially glasnost in the Soviet Union, which reduced fear and encouraged dissidence.

The consensus around the socialist norms was studied in detail by the German historian Ulf Brunnbauer in a large-scale work on the "socialist way of life" in Bulgaria.¹⁴⁹ Brunnbauer begins with the initial mobilization of the masses and the demand of sacrifices and ascetic way of life in the building of the new society (i.e., youth brigades, the construction of the industrial town Dimitrovgrad, and the steel-producing giant Kremik-ovtsi) and then proceeds to study the life experiences of the people en-

¹⁴⁹ Ulf Brunnbauer, "Die sozialistische Lebensweise," in *Ideologie, Gesellschaft und Politik in Bulgarien (1944–1989)* (Vienna, Cologne, and Weimar: Böhlau Verlag, 2007).

gaged in industrialization and urbanization. Finally he investigates the efforts of the authorities (especially through the Fatherland Front, transformed into a mass organization) to create a socialist way of life and to cultivate a “socialist man,” including the family and reproductive policies. Seen from this everyday-life perspective, socialism has had a real legitimacy and has struck deep roots—it was built into the deeper value orientations and the habits of the people. A broad strata of the population accepted as their own the values propagated by the regime, such as equality and social justice, progress and material well-being, education and culture, but also patriotism, especially as some of these were rooted in pre-socialist times. Acceptance of the regime was facilitated by an ascendant social mobility and the increase in living standards. It is true that the realities of life often fell short of the postulated values and ideals and that ordinary citizens did not allow themselves to be passively shaped by the authorities’ ideological goals and precepts about a socialist way of life. On the other hand, the regime itself demonstrated considerable flexibility and readiness to adapt and compromise with the realities of life and reconciled itself to a range of social practices as long as they did not threaten its power structures. One should not underestimate the regime’s ability to transform the society—socialist man was not a purely ideological illusion. The study of everyday life thus allows Brunnbauer to account for the formative side of socialism neglected by more negative analyses.

A peculiar description-explanation of the system of socialism is offered by a circle of sociologists and political scientists—the so-called theory of the “second networks” inspired primarily by the Czech author Ivo Možny. The point of departure is the socialist “economy of deficit” (pace János Kornai), which made necessary the search for “connections” for supplying the deficit goods and led to the creation of “second” distribution networks alongside the official channels of trading. In a way similar to the exchange of “gifts” in premodern societies (classically studied by Marcel Mauss), the non-market exchange (in kind) created social networks for the exchange of goods and also of statuses (or power). Such social networks functioned outside the official hierarchy and created rival social relations and hierarchies, which (according to some) even functioned as a surrogate for a “civil society.” Gradually they “colonized” the state. At a certain moment for a part of the ruling elite, which participated in such networks, it became more profitable to legalize them. This led to a split among the elite, and the communist regime fell with unexpected ease, because the revolution had already taken place in the “colonization” of the state by the networks.

This theory underwent elaborations of various sorts, such as the assertion of productive functions of the networks as well (not only redistributive) and especially the idea of weakness of power under socialism (contrary to totalitarian theories), especially as regards economic power, but also as regards political power. The network theorists refer to Marx's idea about things (and property in general) as social power and the market exchange as a veiling and mystification of social relations of inequality. Socialism, with its nationalized property and pseudo-market without functioning price-building mechanisms, blocks the mediating (self-driven) mechanisms of the market; this in turn renders power (of the market, but also political power) purely subjective (i.e., personal) and arbitrary. Such a nakedly subjectified power of people over people without the objectifying mediation of the market is, according to the authors, too weak and even unreal, in spite of the appearance of being all-powerful; precisely in compensating for its weakness it generates the "second networks" of relations and exchanges.¹⁵⁰

What seems (to me, at least) more adequate in this connection is American cultural anthropologist Gerald Creed's idea about the "domestication" of the socialist revolution, developed in his research during late socialism in Veselinovo, a village in Bulgaria.¹⁵¹ He takes up and elaborates further the topic of the village after collectivization by showing how the peasants adapted to cooperative agriculture and to pressure "from above" and how, without visible resistance and even while overtly complying, they carried out a quiet and deep transformation of the command-administrative system, forcing it to negotiate and compromise and thus making it more bearable. Creed uses the term "conflicting complementarity" to designate the cohabitation and mutual adjustment between the private initiative of the peasants and the cooperative economy and the state administration, or more generally, between the official economy and the "gray" (or informal) economy. By using ethnographic observations and other data, he analyzes peasant households' various strategies of survival

¹⁵⁰ See Deyan Deyanov, Andrei Raichev, Andrei Bundzhulov, Ivan Chalukov, and others in the special issue of *Sotsiologicheski problemi* 35, no. 1–2 (2003). See also Andrei Bundzhulov, *Heterotropii* (Sofia: Kritika i humanizum, 1995), 75–81. A critical appraisal of this theory by Petya Kabakchieva appears in the above special issue.

¹⁵¹ Gerald Creed, *Opitomyavane na revolyutsiyata. Ot sotsialisticheskite reformi kum protivorechiviya prekhod v edno bulgarsko selo* (Domesticating revolution. From socialist reform to ambivalent transition in a Bulgarian village) (Sofia: Apostrofi, 2005), esp. 14–23, 115–116, 194–196, 213–217, 283–285. (Published in English by Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998.)

and of achieving a certain measure of prosperity, such as: theft of public property, working of land for private use (and the growing importance of the produce from this land), the renting of cooperative land for cultivation of a certain crop as piecework, as well as the mobilization of various “connections” (such as of family or friends) in bartering goods and services. The state economy that initially appears all-inclusive and guided by plan was in fact forced to make numerous compromises with these practices and lived in symbiosis with the “gray economy” (the informal sector) because of its inability to supply the population with vital goods (the economy of deficit), in spite of the power instincts of the economic functionaries. The “gray economy” was organically and intricately connected with the official economy, which still set the parameters and modeled the development, though in an unplanned and extremely uncontrollable way. This is meant as a critique of the monolithic totalitarian models and of the idea of total control. Yet unlike the network theorists, Creed does not state that the second economy of “networks” and unofficial exchanges subverted and replaced the official economy (nor that these activities went outside the wider framework of power). On the contrary, the informal economy supplemented the formal one and could exist only in symbiosis with it; the transition rendered it meaningless and destroyed it.

Socialist Modernization

Socialism represents, among other things, a modernizing project for backward societies, and for that reason any assessment and critique of socialism cannot do without a consideration of this aspect. The power-holders themselves treated five-year-plan development in terms of modernization (industrialization, a scientific-technical revolution, intensification of the productivity of labor) and made comparisons with the West in the attempt to reach and overtake it. But the development and progress achieved by socialism were then treated in an optimistic mood and for propaganda purposes as unproblematic: accelerating tempo—further and further, higher and higher, concealing the actual situation. After the fall of socialism, a critical reappraisal was made of the development, of the general directions followed and the particular policies, especially the economic policies. These and the results are now seen in a realistic way and in the light of various theories of underdevelopment. The question is: was socialism successful as an attempt at modernization? To what extent, in what spheres, and at what price? To put the same question negatively: in what did it not succeed, why, and could such a system progress at all?

Dimitŭr Ludzhev formulates clear answers in works from the beginning of the transition.¹⁵² In short: the point of departure of Bulgarian socialism was comparatively low, starting from a backward society in the capitalist "periphery" in the effort to close the gap and catch up with the more advanced states. Bulgaria's developmental model was the well-known Soviet model. It was able to transform the traditional socioeconomic structure, mainly defined by peasant smallholding, and to modernize Bulgaria toward the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s, turning it into a predominantly industrial country with a predominantly urban society. But its weaknesses were industrialization for its own sake, agricultural stagnation, underdeveloped services, shortages, low-quality goods, and low living standards. The command-administrative model of organization could only achieve extensive development and depleted its potential toward the end of the 1960s. The need to intensify economic development was then acutely felt. But the attempts at economic reform, the introduction of scientific-technical progress, and reintegration in the world economic system were half-hearted and incompatible with the centralized command-administrative system, which demonstrated a strong instinct for self-preservation. Moreover, many of the reforms were ill-conceived and mistaken, especially the etatization of the cooperatives and their enlargement in so-called "agrarian-industrial complexes," wrongly set industrial priorities and support for unviable industries, and the orientation of foreign trade exclusively toward the undemanding Soviet market. The modernization has a social dimension as well: a relatively successful shaping of a new social structure, especially the formation of a modern type of worker and stabilization of the working class (in the 1970s), fast growth in the number of civil servants and state employees, transformation of the peasants into members of cooperatives, and creation of modern city dwellers as a result of the urbanization processes. However, the social transformation was accompanied by social "aberrations," such as inordinate growth of the bureaucracy, whose work became extremely ineffective; employment of the intelligentsia primarily outside the productive sphere; a difficult and painful urbanization process with many distortions;

¹⁵² Dimitŭr Ludzhev, "Opitŭt za prekhod kŭm sotsializma v stranite ot Iztochna Evropa" (The attempt at a transition to socialism in the states of Eastern Europe), *Istoricheski pregled* 46, no. 1 (1990): 67–81; Dimitŭr Ludzhev, "Predpostavki. Opit za prekhod kŭm sotsializŭm v Bŭlgariya i Iztochna Evropa" (Prerequisites. The attempt at a transition to socialism in Bulgaria and Eastern Europe), in Dimitŭr Ludzhev, Boika Vasileva, and Iskra Baeva, *Utopiya i realnost* (Utopia and reality) (Sofia: Universitetsko izdatelstvo "Sv. Kliment Okhridski," 1991), 9–51.

and depopulation of the villages. According to Ludzhev, this model as a whole had an enormous social price and was untenable in the long run in comparison with other strategies of modernization of countries departing from a similar point (in Europe and Latin America).

Some works of Iliyana Marcheva also examine socialism through the perspective of modernization, though with a more positive view. She also emphasizes that Bulgarian development followed the Soviet model (with some modifications) as a strategy of “catching up with” development along an isolationist (autarkic) path in the framework of Comecon (the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance) and oriented exclusively toward the Soviet economy. At the same time she emphasizes the continuity of Bulgarian development before and after September 9, 1944, expressed in the state’s efforts to develop industries and its strong role as an engine of modernization. The familiar features of this development that, she believes, eventually led to a modern industrial society were forced industrialization, the predominance of heavy industry and neglect of light industry, forced mobilization of labor resources, collectivization, and the squeezing of agriculture in favor of industrialization and urbanization. The forced development generally took place through intensified exploitation of the working people by the state, and it contradicted the humane ideals proclaimed by the new society. According to Marcheva the dominant role of the state in the economy is characteristic of every belated and compensating development, not only of the totalitarian system, and the issue is only that the state should not be a party-state.¹⁵³

Works like these provoked a critique for “normalizing” socialism as a modernizing project, or more precisely, as a strategy of “catching up with” modernization.¹⁵⁴ It is easy to contest the continuity with the modernizing efforts of the Bulgarian state before 1944 in spite of the great role of the state in both eras: the economic priorities were very different, and so was the force and the means of the state intervention, while the total

¹⁵³ Iliyana Marcheva, “Predizvikatelstvata na modernizatsiyata v Bŭlgariya sled Vtorata svetovna voina” (The challenges of modernization in Bulgaria after World War II), *Novo vreme* 70, no. 1 (1995): 47–60; Iliyana Marcheva, “Sŭvetskiyat model v bŭlgarskata ikonomika” (The Soviet model in the Bulgarian economy), *Istoricheski pregled* 52, no. 3 (1996): 64–82, esp. 73.

¹⁵⁴ Daniela Koleva and Ivan Elenkov, “Promenite v bŭlgarskata istoricheska nauka sled 1989 g.: ochertaniya i granitsi” (Changes in Bulgarian historical science after 1989: outlines and boundaries), in *Balkanskiyat XIX vek. Drugi prochiti* (The Balkan nineteenth century. Other readings), ed. Diana Mishkova (Sofia: Riva, 2006), 28–81, esp. 52–54.

nationalization of property and the command-administrative system of state socialism are unprecedented.

The "normalization" of the socialist modernization is far more pronounced in the writings of the sociologist Niko Stefanov. Stefanov said there was no other way to catch up with the more advanced states than to introduce a centralized model of management of the economy and the society and centralized state property, because only in this manner could considerable resources be mobilized. The Soviet experience had proven that when a state was starting from a low initial level of development, centralization could accelerate economic processes. During the initial processes of industrialization in general, which require an extensive type of development, state centralization and state management accorded well with the goals of socioeconomic progress.¹⁵⁵ It is noteworthy how a description of the Soviet case of modernization is turned into a (normative) requirement of modernization.

Bulgarian economic development is viewed from a different perspective by the historian Gospodinka Nikova, namely in terms of Soviet penetration and a reorientation of the economy toward the Soviet Union, with enormous consequences.¹⁵⁶ Soviet penetration took place with strong coercion during the trial against Traicho Kostov, which dealt a blow to the entire economic apparatus, and the Soviet advisers were given not only access to the economy, but also control over it. All attempts at a more independent economic policy were cut short. Most importantly, foreign trade relations and the market character of the Bulgarian economy were disrupted. The country was isolated from the world economy and included in an autarkic economy at a lower level of development (the Soviet economy and later Comecon) with the ruble as a means of payment and prices that differed from world prices, thus losing the stimuli and the mechanisms of adapting to the world market. Bulgaria developed a strong dependency on Soviet raw materials and the Soviet market, which aggravated the economic catastrophe after 1989.

¹⁵⁵ Niko Stefanov, "Georgi Dimitrov i sŭvremennostta" (Georgi Dimitrov and the present), in *Georgi Dimitrov—mezhdŭ vŭzhkhalata*, 188–195, esp. 193–194.

¹⁵⁶ Gospodinka Nikova, "Bŭlgaro-sŭvetskite ikonomicheski otnosheniya sled Vtorata svetovna voina (1949–1960)" (Bulgarian-Soviet economic relations after World War II, 1949–1960), in *Bŭlgariya i Rusiya prez XX vek* (Bulgaria and Russia in the twentieth century) (Sofia: Gutenberg, 2000), 245–256; Gospodinka Nikova, "Sŭvetskoto ikonomicheskŭo pronikvane v Bŭlgariya sled Vtorata svetovna voina" (Soviet economic penetration in Bulgaria after World War II), *Istoricheski pregled* 52, no. 2 (1996): 105–123.

Finally, one can mention the interesting debate between the economic historians Roumen Avramov and Martin Ivanov. Avramov sees a deep continuity between the Bulgarian etatist capitalism of the 1930s and communism. The continuity lies in the animosity of the Bulgarian petty bourgeois milieu towards (big) capitalism despite the attitudes favoring small-scale property; the even earlier collectivist and “communal” attitudes and ideologems of priority of the “society” and “creative role” of the state, which found expression in the cooperativist ideology, in etatism and corruption (for instance, plundering the state); and also in the vulnerability of precisely the petty bourgeoisie to the illusions of equality, social justice, and labor property. In addition to favorable attitudes, communism also found a ready-made “economic machine”—almost total etatization of the credit and strong etatism in general. Thus according to Avramov the socialist years were neither an “aberration” compared to the preceding development nor a “point of radical economic break.” Instead, socialism came “on prepared ground” and stood “in the firmly fixed direction” of Bulgarian economic history: toward the mid-1940s the country was “pregnant with socialism.” On the other hand, socialism presents the extreme development and apogee of the above-mentioned tendencies clad in a totalitarian form. The communal and corporatist tendencies were “increased to paroxysm,” the state principle reached “hypertrophy,” the dream of cheap and easy credit was carried to the extreme, the interest rate as a price of capital and the prices in general disappeared as regulators, and the economy became naturalized and demonetized and isolated from the international markets.¹⁵⁷

Ivanov, in his turn, contests the thesis of the country’s “pregnancy with socialism” and offers the counter-hypothesis that Bulgaria was then in a transition from a semi-traditional toward an industrial society. There were resources for a successful modernization that would spare the high “price” of the forced communist transition. Ivanov cites as an example the intensification of agriculture since the 1930s as proof that an agrarian transformation was underway. He also points to the demographic transition and the accumulation of social and human capital (the cooperatives, cultural societies, and other associations are seen as institutions of “sociability”

¹⁵⁷ Roumen Avramov, *Stopanskiyat XX vek na Bŭlgariya* (The economic twentieth century of Bulgaria) (Sofia: Tsentŭr za liberalni strategii, 2001), 107–109, 144–148; Roumen Avramov, *Komunalniyat kapitalizŭm. Iz bŭlgarskoto stopansko minalo* (Communal capitalism. From the Bulgarian economic past), vol. 3 (Sofia: Tsentŭr za liberalni strategii, Fondatsiya “Bŭlgarska nauka i kultura,” 2007), 432–434.

and generators of trust, and not only of communalism). Conversely, he does not consider the communal efforts and the etatization of the credit as that important or as specifically Bulgarian at the time. According to him, the communist dictatorship and the "monstrous communist project" were the least probable scenario in the natural way of development, and were it not for the Red Army, the country would most probably have followed the path of "democratic etatism" and Keynesian social policies (an opinion actually shared by Roumen Avramov).¹⁵⁸

As in many polemics, the issue in dispute is somewhat displaced. In fact, Roumen Avramov does not affirm that the communist project was the most "natural" or probable development for Bulgaria or that it would have imposed itself without external force. Rather, he sees in the preceding economic development some conditions and mental attitudes that facilitated its imposition. And he certainly does not "normalize" the economy of communism, but rather abnormalizes the preceding economic development (which he calls "communal capitalism"). Both constitute an "aberration" from the authentic market principles of economic liberalism. But communism is the absolute extreme in the economy, and it is totalitarian in its politics. In any case, the availability of preconditions for communism in Bulgaria should be taken seriously.

Aspects of the System

In the last few years well-substantiated monographs have appeared on aspects of the system, characterizing the institutions and mechanisms in various domains and tracing the evolution of its structural features. One example is Aleksandŭr Vezekov's work on the nomenklatura as "power through cadres."¹⁵⁹ The nomenklatura is treated here not as a class, but in the authentic sense of lists of positions, the appointment to which is in the competence of some higher "organ." This institution is at the base of the communist rule, and it did not change much after its initial formation in spite of the changes in the length of the lists and the transfer of some ap-

¹⁵⁸ Martin Ivanov, "Chudoto na zachatiето ili kak Bulgariya be 'obremenena s komuni-zŭm'" (The miracle of conception, or how Bulgaria was "burdened with communism"), *Sotsiologicheski problemi* 39, no. 3-4 (2007): 303-337, esp. 305-307, 332-333.

¹⁵⁹ Aleksandŭr Vezekov, *Vlastovite strukturi na Bŭlgarskata komunisticheska partiya 1944-1989* (The power structures of the Bulgarian Communist Party, 1944-1989). (Sofia: Institut za izsledvane na blizkoto minalo, Institut "Otvoreno obshtestvo," Cielu, 2008).

pointments from one organ to another. In this respect communist rule demonstrates a deep structural continuity in the exercise of power and control over the society in all spheres.

State Security as the power prop of the communist regime is the subject of a special study by Momchil Metodiev.¹⁶⁰ Although part of the archival material is still inaccessible, the available material is sufficient to outline its basic functions and draw the following conclusions. Though State Security had various departments with differently formulated tasks, its basic activity was to fight a potential political opposition, using means that included the surveillance of Bulgarian émigrés abroad and foreign citizens in Bulgaria. In this sense, taken as a whole, it was a “political police.” The counter-intelligence in particular, which in principle had to maintain the internal security of the regime by fighting enemies and foreign propaganda, was actually occupied mostly with preventing the rise of a political opposition, and controlling Bulgarian citizens (and the military counter-intelligence—through surveillance of the army). Within State Security there was a political police in a narrower sense: the notorious Department Six, whose activity was directed specifically against the more critically minded and socially sensitive sections of the population—the intelligentsia, youth, and minorities—with the goal of preventing dissidence and anti-communist organizations. The assertion that State Security was engaged in protecting the national security is largely meaningless and misleading, because it protected primarily the security of the Communist Party (particularly of its leadership) and the regime and also because of its close ties with the Soviet secret services and the country’s limited sovereignty.

As Metodiev attests, Bulgaria’s State Security tended to seek autonomy from the political authorities and to use repressive measures, due to its paranoid notions about enemies and enemy conspiracies: it not only acted against real political adversaries of the system, but produced imaginary enemies to justify its own importance. There were tensions and power struggles in the relations between State Security and the Communist Party, for whose protection it was created. Twice the security services largely broke free of the Communist Party’s control and went so far as to act against its higher functionaries. This was the case especially during the

¹⁶⁰ Momchil Metodiev, *Mashina za legitimnost. Rolyata na Dürzhavna sigurnost v komunisticheskata dürzhava* (Machine for legitimacy. The role of State Security in the communist state) (Sofia: Institut za izsledvane na blizkoto minalo, Institut “Otvoreno obshtestvo,” Ciela, 2008), the figures on 74–75.

early period (1944–1954), when the “organs” acted extremely repressively and indiscriminately, first in destroying the political opposition and then in the campaign against the enemy with a “party card,” obeying only the party leader (as his personal instrument for punishing political opponents). State Security earned notoriety and instilled such a fear in the populace that afterwards, it was able to replace open repression with preventive measures and threats (“prophylaxis”) and to rely more on secret agents (“informers”) than on direct physical coercion. After Vŭlko Chervenkov’s unsuccessful attempt to reduce State Security to the “eyes and ears of the Party and of the People’s rule” in 1954, it was placed under party control by Todor Zhivkov, and its activities were regulated by a number of documents, so that until 1967 its real political influence was weak. In 1967 Department Six was created as an openly political police in a situation of ebbing public support for the regime; policies concerning the émigré community outside Bulgaria also abruptly turned negative. From the mid-1980s onwards, State Security once again started growing in numbers and political influence as the regime’s legitimacy weakened due to the economic crisis, the impact of Soviet perestroika, and Moscow’s withdrawal of political support. During this period there occurred a new massive political coercion, the so-called “regenerative process” (*vŭzroditelen protses*), an attempt to assimilate the Turks and the Muslims, which resulted in a mass exodus from the country. As Metodiev points out, the activities of State Security were not restricted to collecting information, surveillance, and repression to parry the formation of a political opposition, but included so-called “active measures” (*aktivni meropriyatiya*) to secure legitimacy and rally public support for the regime. These ranged from media manipulation to abductions and murders in order to influence public opinion, to discredit certain people, and to prevent the spread of discontent or protest. According to Metodiev’s data and estimates, the staff of State Security numbered around 6,200 persons in 1962 and 12,000–13,000 at the end of the communist regime, to which some 50,000–60,000 secret collaborators and informers must be added, totaling roughly 62,000–73,000 people, or one percent of the population.¹⁶¹

Another recently published work goes into the “political economy” of the Bulgarian socialism and attempts at reform during the last three dec-

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 87–88. The East German Stasi had 95,000 officers and over 100,000 informants among a population of some sixteen million; the Romanian Securitate had approximately 38,000 officers and around 400,000 informants in a population of twenty-three million (or around two percent of the population).

ades of its existence.¹⁶² According to Martin Ivanov, structural (“genetically inborn”) restrictions and invisible barriers cropped up at every attempt at reform in Bulgaria, in 1963–1968, in 1976–1983, and in 1984–1989, in spite of the otherwise sincere intentions for reform and the communist leadership’s understanding that reform was needed. Such barriers included the issue of property and state control over the economy as a precondition for keeping political power in the hands of the elite. In the words of Todor Zhivkov, the dilemma (which finally proved insoluble) was “how to become more flexible [*da se razkrepostim*] while the state still holds the major leverages.” Given these basic assumptions, all reforms, such as fewer planned indicators; changes in organization and management; and reform measures in investment, prices, credit, and foreign currency were bound to remain half-baked and doomed to failure. They were not able to increase the individual incentives and initiative and to create a real market environment but only fostered new bureaucratic structures.

The attempted “substitutes of reform” (as Ivanov calls them) also failed, such as the concentration of production in large-scale enterprises (the so-called “state economic associations,” which immediately became bureaucratic), the scientific-technological revolution with the insurmountable difficulties of implementation, and the reliance on assistance from the Soviet Union. The limited substitutes for private property and private initiative, such as small patches of land for private use, the lease of cooperative land, and finally, the transfer of economic assets to “workers’ collectives” to be managed (not as property), helped supply the population with foodstuffs and other goods but could not reorient the economy toward the market. Even the supposedly most radical reform—Decree 56 on the Activities of Firms—contains conditions in the rules of application that render it meaningless, such as full or majority participation of the state in the major economic branches and allowing for private initiative only in secondary and unattractive activities, the selling of shares only among employees of the enterprise, the placing of “comrades” as confidantes of the party and the state on the firms’ supervisory boards, and excessive taxation of profits. Ivanov’s inferences that the economic system did not lend itself to reform as a matter of principle, and that this constituted “reformism without reforms,” are fully justified.

¹⁶² Martin Ivanov, *Reformatorstvo bez reformi. Politicheskata ikonomiya na bŭlgarskiya komunizŭm 1963–1989* (Reformism without reform. The political economy of Bulgarian communism, 1963–1989) (Sofia: Institut za izsledvane na blizkoto minalo, Institut “Otvoreno obshtestvo,” Ciela, 2008).

The analysis of the socialist economy by the economic historian Roumen Avramov is especially penetrating and sharp.¹⁶³ He approaches the economic history of socialism in terms of money, finance, and credit, which in the neoclassical economic theory are key and decisive parameters, in contrast to the thinking "in kind" characteristic of the economists of socialism. Avramov reveals the underlying assumptions (and "innate defects") of the socialist rulers' economic thinking and behavior, namely the primacy of material goods over money, the plan and all-embracing administrative control, the dogma of uninterrupted growth (the so-called "tempo of growth"), the fixed and constant prices (considered to be a condition of political tranquility), the dogma of total employment, the "soft budget constraints" (János Kornai), and "automatic credit," which safeguarded the enterprises from bankruptcy. In the absence of "feedback" and market signals, such an economy invariably generated disproportions and imbalances, and the plan became a fiction (because it was constantly being changed), while (latent) inflation became rampant, finding expression in the deficit of goods and the forced accumulation of savings among the population. The situation was temporarily remedied and held in check only by internal debts of the budget, which constantly decapitalized the bank system and the savings, and by way of foreign debts (the default on which was postponed several times thanks to Russian credits). Economic development, far from consisting of steady growth, saw periodic crises and desperate attempts to postpone the collapse of the ineffective system. Avramov infers the complete economic failure of the socialist economy, which had some extensive "rationality" of its own only during the initial period of accelerated industrialization, but demonstrated an utter inability to adapt to the more advanced economies of the West; attempts at reform further destabilized the system and speeded its collapse. Furthermore, he concludes that the system was insusceptible to reform. Strong power interests in favor of keeping political control (for which the economy was only an instrument) blocked the necessary radical measures, not to mention the fact that even the informed elites among the ruling class lacked a deep understanding of economics.

The guidance and ideology of the cultural sphere under socialism is studied in a recent monograph by Ivan Elenkov.¹⁶⁴ The evolution of the

¹⁶³ Roumen Avramov, *Pari i de/stabilizatsiya*.

¹⁶⁴ Ivan Elenkov, *Kulturniyat front. Bŭlgarskata kultura prez epokhata na komunizma—politichesko upravlenie, ideologicheski osnovaniya, institutsionalni rezhimi* (The cultural front. Bulgarian culture during the communist era—political management, ideo-

state cultural institutions began with the (candidly named) Ministry of Propaganda (in direct continuity with the “fascist” Directorate of National Propaganda) and after various transformations ended up as the Ministry of Culture. Culture was initially thought of as a “superstructure” and as mere propaganda for communist ideas and an instrument for the formation of the new socialist man. Elenkov uses the term “polit-aesthetics” to signal the close ties between politics and culture under socialism, the politicization of the aesthetic sphere and the aestheticization of politics (in the forms of official “ostentation,” celebrations, marches, and so on). The attitudes of the authorities toward the intelligentsia changed from early intimidation towards attempts at integration and rallying around the official notions of national culture through material incentives from admission to the privileged “creative unions” (for writers, artists, musicians, and others) to the commissioning of state contracts. In addition to state intervention in high culture, Elenkov also examines mass culture during socialism, as well as the material culture of goods, categorized into articles of mass consumption (*shirpotreba*) and luxury items.

Special attention is paid to Lyudmila Zhivkova (Zhikov’s daughter)—to her presidency of the Committee of Culture (colloquially called *lyudmi-lie*) and her eccentric views and ideas of a “politics of beauty” and the formation of well-rounded and harmoniously developed socialist individuals, as well as the attempts to implement them in various programs. In contrast to early socialism, culture was conceived here as belonging to the “basis” of the society and as formative of the individual. This nourished a new self-understanding of the intelligentsia as a national spiritual (intellectual) elite. A major project of the cultural politics of the 1970s was the affirmation of the nation, which culminated in the celebration of the 1,300th anniversary of the creation of the Bulgarian state in 1981. The past was increasingly appropriated as a legitimating resource by the communist regime, which represented itself as a “second golden age” and the apex of all preceding history, while communist mythology was merged with the national(ist) cults. After Lyudmila’s death an ideological reaction set in during the 1980s, and the fragile cultural pluralism and freedom were restricted. Cultural politics became nationalistic, fixed on ethnogenesis and national unity and directed toward the so-called “regeneration process” (against the Turkish minority). The end of the socialist regime was marked by attempts at “self-government” in the sphere of culture, that

logical foundations, institutional regimes) (Sofia: Institut za izsledvane na blizkoto minalo, Institut “Otvoreno obshtestvo,” Ciela, 2008).

is, giving artists the opportunity to set up creative associations of their own and cultural commercial firms.

Because of its proximity in time and considerable documentation, socialism became a fruitful field for the application of various approaches and interdisciplinary research. I will mention just a few topics of this heterogeneous and sprawling scholarship that are directly relevant to the symbolic revaluation of socialism. The fall of communism gave an impetus to oral history, which collects and analyzes interviews and "life histories." This approach shows what people remember and how they remember it in the first place. As a result one gets interesting personal accounts of important large-scale ("historical") events, often at odds with the "grand narratives" of socialism with their official meanings, emphases, and heroes.¹⁶⁵ The monuments of socialism are being studied as *lieux de memoire*. They are analyzed as artistic representations of certain ideals of man, life, labor, and heroism. Socialism, though atheist and even opposed to traditional religion, had its own "otherworld" and "privileged dead" ("saints"), "holy" places and quasi-religious cults, which aimed at instructing the living. The fall of the communist regime led to reinterpretation, desacralization, and even desecration of its monuments, some of which were dismantled and removed.¹⁶⁶ More generally, the official "memory of socialism" with its *lieux de memoire*, but also symbols and heroes, became subject to contestation and unraveling; in the symbolic struggles over memory, heroes and victims often changed places; the vocabularies of making sense of the past also changed in the process.¹⁶⁷ The

¹⁶⁵ Daniela Koleva, "Spomen i pamet v usnite razkazi za 9 septemvri 1944 g." (Remembrance and memory in the oral stories about September 9, 1944), in *Kulturata: granitsi i süsedstva. V chest na Prof. Ivan Stefanov* (Culture: Boundaries and neighborhoods. In honor of Prof. Ivan Stefanov), ed. Daniela Koleva and Maya Grekova (Sofia: Universitetsko izdatelstvo "Sv. Kliment Okhridski," 2005), 348–373; Daniela Koleva, "Sotsializmüt kato zhiteiski püt. Predgovor" (Socialism as a life course. Introduction), in *Vürkhu hrastite ne padat*, 9–20. See also the memories of socialism collected by Georgi Gospodinov via an Internet site: Georgi Gospodinov, ed., *Az zhivayakh sotsializma. 171 lichni istorii* (I lived socialism. 171 personal stories) (Sofia: IK "Zhanet 45," 2006), especially the introduction.

¹⁶⁶ Nikolai Voukov, "Monuments Between Life and Death: Memory and Representation in Monuments of the Socialist Past in Bulgaria." Dissertation, Central European University, 2004; Nikolai Voukov, "Death and Desecration: Monuments of the Socialist Past in Bulgaria after 1989," *Anthropology of Eastern Europe Review*, special issue (2003).

¹⁶⁷ Lilyana Deyanova, "Dnevniküt na Georgi Dimitrov i mestata na pametta" (Georgi Dimitrov's diary and the places of memory), *Sotsiologicheski problemi* 35, no. 1–2 (2003): 196–207.

socialist textbooks and school materials, especially on Bulgarian history and literature, were studied to uncover their “hidden agenda.” They were (re)searched for “images of the enemy” and traces of intolerance of any kind and in order to rewrite them for a civic society and a democratic state.¹⁶⁸

The reassessment of the recent past itself—the so-called “rewriting of history”—became a topic of reflection. As noted by Iskra Baeva and Evgeniya Kalinova, the new interpretation of the socialist past includes the revision of textbooks and curricula, the renaming of streets and squares, the dismantling of old monuments and the erection of new ones. The print and electronic media played a prominent role in reassessing the past. It was not primarily professional historians, but journalists, authors of memoirs, and other popularizers, as well as political scientists, sociologists, and economists appearing in the mass media who were most prominent in this role in the first years of the transition. As for history itself, the post-communist transition emphasized its social and presentist function in providing every new generation with motivation for solving the problems of its own times. The authors point to the strongly politicized social context in which the reassessment takes place.¹⁶⁹

The “new reading” of the contemporary history of Bulgaria, that is, its rewriting to de-communize it, is linked by the sociologist Andrei Bundzhulov to the political confrontation during the transition. In the struggle between the “old former people” (victims of repression, dissidents) and the “new former people” (from the communist elite), history functions as a resource for political legitimization and satisfies parties’ and elites’ need for identity, especially new ones. It is not only a stake in the political game, but a “ferment in elite-building” by creating typical biographical trajectories and identities of the rival forces. While the “old former people” utilized the past in a strategy of “restitution” of symbolic capital (parallel to the restitution of economic capital), the “new former people” undertook a strategy of “conversion” of their political, but also economic

¹⁶⁸ Deyan Deyanov, ed., *Prenapisvaneto na istoriyata v uchebnitsite za gimnaziite* (The rewriting of history in high-school textbooks) (Sofia: Ministerstvo na obrazovaniето i naukata, 1996).

¹⁶⁹ Iskra Baeva and Evgeniya Kalinova, “Istoricheskite refleksii na bŭlgarskiya prekhod” (Historical reflections on the Bulgarian transition), in *Istoricheskata nauka v Bŭlgariya. Sŭstoyanie i perspektivi* (Historical science in Bulgaria. State of affairs and prospects), ed. Antoaneta Zapryanova, Blagovest Nyagulov, and Iliyana Marcheva (Sofia: Institut po istoriya pri BAN, 2006), 265–276.

and symbolic, capital. This led to what was called the "battle for the past" or the "war over the past."¹⁷⁰

Beyond this too-instrumental treatment, the battle over socialism has a deep existential dimension. For the generations of "builders of socialism," it comes down to the question: was life under socialism better than what followed? Did I actually fare better under socialism?—with the infinite variety of personal experiences, changes of status for the better or the worse, value judgments, discontents of aging, and so on, factoring into the always individual (yet claiming "objectivity") yes-or-no answer. With the passing of generations, the existential dimension is fading. The notions about state socialism are increasingly based upon secondhand information, hence on an institutionalized "memory of socialism." Thus what is at stake in the current debates is how socialism—receding into the past—should enter the textbooks and remain in the memory of future generations, how it will be thought of and assessed by them. This being so, all authors who write on the subject, even if they are relatively unbiased and very conscientious in presenting the "facts," are nevertheless involved in a "politics of memory." In the textbooks this politics is deliberate, consistently pursued, and state-supervised and -controlled. In specialized historiography, in accordance with the pluralism of opinions in society, the writing is from different standpoints, and various voices and counter-voices make themselves heard. Under free conditions there will always be room for dissent. In this, among other things, the post-communist "rewriting of history" differs from communist historiography. This will hardly make the judgment of socialism—a value question—more "objective" or universally accepted. However, it will give an informed person the possibility to know what he/she likes or does not like about socialism, and why.

¹⁷⁰ Andrei Bundzhulov, "Bitkata za minaloto" (The battle over the past), in *Litsa na vreme to* (Faces of the times), vol. 1 (Sofia: Tsentr za istoricheski i politologicheski izsledvaniya, 1996), 157–168.

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CONCLUSION

The Truth and Objectivity Question in Bulgarian Historical Scholarship

In what follows, I will review the concepts of “objectivity” and “truth” in Bulgarian historical scholarship on the basis of my historiographical research and observations. As will be seen, there is a great difference between theoretical-methodological statements and historiographical practice. However, my purpose is not to blame the presumably “objective” historiography for “lack of objectivity” (especially since I do not believe in this ideal), but to see how things stand on particular issues of the “objectivity and truth” complex. Hence the account is somewhat fragmented. The question will also be posed: why were there, until recently, no relativizations of the notion of objectivity?

The professionalization of historical scholarship in Bulgaria took place under predominantly German (and partly Russian) influence, imported by Bulgarian historians who studied in those countries and identified with nineteenth-century positivism.¹ This explains the adoption of the term “science” (implying rigorous knowledge not unlike the natural sciences), in contrast to the Anglo-Saxon understanding of history writing, where it is part of the humanities and perceived as qualitatively different. Bulgarian “bourgeois” historians were not engaged much in reflection on philosophical and methodological issues of historical knowledge, especially as they had to urgently accumulate a corps of sources and derive facts from them from which to reconstruct the historical course of events (mostly about the state and church). More explicit are some introductory lectures, forewords, and documents of the Historical Society.² Still, the

¹ A general review of positivism in Bulgaria in Mariya Veleva, “Razvitie na istoricheskata nauka v Bŭlgariya sled Osvobozhdenieto” (Development of historical science in Bulgaria after the Liberation), in *Sbornik lektzii po sleddiplomna kvalifikatsiya*, vol. 6 (Sofia: Sofiiski universitet “Kliment Okhridski,” Istoricheski fakultet, 1983), 74–110, esp. 79–89.

² See, for example, the introductory lectures of Vasil Zlatarski (at the end of the nineteenth century) in Vasil Zlatarski, *Lektsionni kursove na Prof. Vasil Zlatarski* (Lecture courses

signs of positivism are clearly recognizable in the understanding of historical events as interconnected in a historical “process” (evolutionism), as well as the belief in progress, in (invariable) regularities of development, and the search for determining factors (geographical, political, economic, spiritual-cultural, and psychological). Positivism is also recognizable in the concept of historical scholarship as science, the belief in rigorous methods (e.g., statistical, comparative) for deriving strict “positive” empirical knowledge (based on “facts” and experience, not speculation), the search for cause-effect relations between the phenomena (causality, the “genetic” method), and the notion of historical fact as a thing-like entity. Crowning all this is the idea of “objective truth” to be achieved through correct application of the methodological procedures, but also as a professional and ethical restraint from subjectiveness and bias in assessing the facts and, in a more extreme version, from judgments in general.

Bulgarian “bourgeois” historians can be divided into two schools according to education, orientation of research, or the preferred “factors” of historical development. These are the “state-and-law” school (e.g., Vasil Zlatarski and Petür Nikov) and the “cultural-historical” school (e.g., Ivan Shishmanov, Boyan Penev, and Mikhail Arnaudov).³ Among their recognized virtues were pedantic attention to the sources and their critical assessment and comparison, conscientious reconstruction of facts, and connecting the facts in historical phenomena and processes. The historians of the second and third generation (in the 1920s and 1930s) were influenced by neo-Kantianism as a later and more sophisticated reflection on the preconditions and the methods of historical knowledge. Most elaborate and sophisticated is the understanding of historical knowledge of the Russian émigré Petr Bicilli (1879–1953), who remained in Bulgaria until the end of his life, working as a professor at Sofia University. Especially sophisticated and far beyond positivism are his ideas on the historiographical synthesis and the possible viewpoints in reconstructing the historical process, and the role of the consciousness of the historian and of his times.⁴

Closely connected with the positivist concept of historical knowledge as “science” is the notion of its “objectivity” and “truth.” The idea (and

of Prof. Vasil Zlatarski), vol. 1 (Universitetsko izdatelstvo “Sv. Kliment Okhridski,” 1999), 46–60, 65–72. Also the presentation of positivism in Petür Nikov, *Zadachata na dneshnata bŭlgarska istoriografiya. Vstŭpitelna leksiya, 25 oktomvri, 1920* (The task of today’s Bulgarian historiography. Introductory lecture, October 25, 1920) (Sofia, 1922).

³ Mariya Veleva, “Razvitie na istoricheskata.”

⁴ Petr Bicilli, *Ochertsii vŭrkhu teoriyata na istoricheskata nauka* (Essays on the theory of historical science) (Sofia: Izdatelstvo na BAN, 1994), esp. 212–217.

myth) of “historical objectivity” is recapitulated by Peter Novick thus: there is a commitment to the reality of the past, and the truth is understood as correspondence (congruence) between knowledge and reality; a sharp separation is made between knower and known, fact and value, history and fiction; historical facts are seen as prior to, and independent of, interpretation; patterns in history are “discovered,” not “created”; the value of the interpretation is judged by how well it explains the facts—if contradicted by the facts, it should be discarded; truth is one, not perspectival.

The role of the historian is of a neutral and unbiased (disinterested) judge, and not of advocate or propagandist; the historian’s inferences must be balanced and equally just (evenhanded) to both sides. These arbitrating qualities are guaranteed by the autonomy of the historical profession and its protection from social pressure and political influence, as well as by the avoidance of partisanship and biases by the individual historian, who does not have a stake in reaching a particular inference. To achieve this goal, the historian must be free of external loyalties and committed to the search for the objective historical truth alone, by showing loyalty only to his colleagues from the profession who share this ideal and the effort to advance toward it.⁵

In American historiography the notion of “historical objectivity” (“that noble dream,” Novick calls it) was attacked—first, in aborted stirrings in the 1930s, then especially radically from the 1960s onwards. The radical attacks came from several quarters: first from extreme Left (Marxist, communist) currents also in the name of truth; later on from African-American and feminist scholars in the name of other viewpoints and perspectives; then from historians outside the academy, in so-called “public history,” who questioned the autonomy and corporatism of the historical discipline in the name of various lobbies and interests (of local communities, of business firms and other clients); and finally from “outside,” that is, from other disciplines, such as the history and philosophy of science, cultural anthropology, law, psychoanalysis, and literary scholarship. In the end no single component (or set of components) listed above of the notion of “historical objectivity” remained unquestioned and not rejected.⁶ I will now turn to the idea of objectivity and truth in Bulgaria under communism and after its fall.

⁵ Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The “Objectivity Question” and the American Historical Profession* (Cambridge University Press, 1988), 1–2.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 415–629.

As is well known (but worth reiterating here), the communist regimes imposed a peculiar concept of historical science in the name of Marxism, the so-called historical materialism. In various statements, the prominent Bulgarian Stalinist ideologue Todor Pavlov has argued the following. The historical process is unitary and progressive, conditioned in depth by the economic factor (the doctrine of the economic “base”). The development proceeds according to “objective regularities” (even “laws”) through various social formations, which replace one another as a result of class struggle through revolutions; the progress of humanity is (teleologically) oriented toward communism. There is only one correct (scientific) teaching, capable of revealing the true “objective” meaning of historical development—historical materialism (and more generally, Marxism). This teaching expresses the viewpoint of the proletariat, which enjoys a special advantage due to its moral superiority and “progressiveness” (i.e., pointing to the future, which belongs to the proletariat). The identification with the proletarian-communist standpoint (expressed in the notion of *partiinost*) in studying the past guarantees the objectivity and truth of the knowledge thus obtained. Marxist historical science not only reveals the objective regularities of historical development, but also assists in educating people in a socialist spirit, in which it reinforces these same objective regularities of development and progress; thus historical science brings theory in close contact with practice.⁷ The following statement by Todor Pavlov gives an idea of the miraculous coincidence between the Communist Party standpoint and objectivity (truth) on the basis of the belief that the “objective course of history” works for communism: “We are not afraid, as the bourgeoisie is afraid, of the objective scientific truth, precisely because it is

⁷ Todor Pavlov, “Za marksicheska istoriya na Bŭlgariya” (Toward a Marxist history of Bulgaria), in Todor Pavlov, *Izbrani proizvedeniya* (Selected works), vol. 3, Sofia: Izdatelstvo na BAN, 1960 (first published 1954), 335–379, esp. 348; Todor Pavlov, “Za nauchnata istoriya izobshto i chastno za nauchnata istoriya na Bŭlgariya” (On scientific history in general and the scientific history of Bulgaria in particular), in Todor Pavlov, *Izbrani proizvedeniya*, vol. 3, 383–396, esp. 389–391; Todor Pavlov, “Za obektivnata i subektivnata strana na istoricheskiya protses” (On the objective and the subjective aspects of the historical process), in Todor Pavlov, *Izbrani proizvedeniya*, vol. 3, 432–459, esp. 444–446, 458–459; Todor Pavlov, “Glavni zadachi na marksieskata istoriya na Bŭlgariya” (Main tasks of the Marxist history of Bulgaria), in Todor Pavlov, *Izbrani proizvedeniya*, vol. 3, 460–489, esp. 472–473, 483–485, 489; Todor Pavlov, “Iz доклад na akademik Todor Pavlov za partiinosta v naukata (20 fevruari 1949 g.)” (From the report of academician Todor Pavlov on the party standpoint in science, February 20, 1949), in *Sŭdŭt nad istoritsite* (The trial of the historians), ed. Vera Mutafchieva and Vesela Chichovska (Sofia: Akademichno izdatelstvo “Prof. Marin Drinov,” 1995), 469–470.

objective, and the objective course of history works for us, as we work actively, joyously, and enthusiastically in its favor. That is why our history is deeply party-related (*partiina*) and at the same time objectively true and rigorously scientific.”⁸

Bourgeois historical methodology is rejected, somewhat surprisingly, as “objectivist” (but not “objective”), more precisely, as a bad and superficial bourgeois objectivism, which consists of pedantry in working with the sources; as philological formalism (an accusation by the Russian academician Nikolai Derzhavin); and as an arbitrary accumulation of facts without evaluations, without differentiating what is “important” in the historical process and without revealing the “deep” and “objective” laws and regularities of historical development. Also rejected is the understanding of the historian’s task as consisting “only of the purely academic, dispassionate, passive-contemplative, politically neutral, apolitical search, description, systematization, etc. of the historical documents, facts, events, etc.”⁹ In addition, bourgeois methodology is rejected as actually being “subjectivist” (in the peculiar sense that it expresses the subjective goals of the bourgeoisie), “idealistic” (in the sense that it undervalues the significance of the forces of production and of the social relations issuing from them and that it ascribes great importance to personalities), “chauvinist” (it educates the people in the spirit of the nationalist goals of the dominant class), and “evolutionary” (it is not concerned with revolutions).

Bulgarian Marxist historical science in particular is entrusted (in an explicitly preconceived manner) with the task of revealing in concrete historical events the manifestation of general objective regularities, in which one should be careful not to find specific traits of Bulgarian history in contradiction with, but rather in basic agreement with, the general laws of historical development as formulated by Marx and Lenin. More precisely, it has to show interest in the classes and the masses, rather than in personalities; to pay special attention to the development of the working class and its revolutionary party and to the facts that determined the vic-

⁸ Todor Pavlov, “Za marksicheska istoriya na Bŭlgariya,” 348 (a statement in connection with the elaboration of a “miniature model” for a history of Bulgaria). Similarly Zhak Natan, “Kŭm vŭprosa za vliyanieto na Stalinovite idei vŭrkhu razvitiето na bŭlgarskata istoricheska nauka” (On the question of the influence of Stalin’s ideas on the development of Bulgarian historical science), *Istoricheski pregled* 6, no. 2 (1949–1950), 159–172, esp. 163. To quote: “The classics of Marxism teach us that in assessing events, we must openly take the viewpoint of a certain social class. The objectivity of Marxist science not only does not preclude partisanship (*partiinnost*) but contains it.”

⁹ Todor Pavlov, “Iz doklad na Todor Pavlov,” 469.

tory of the socialist revolution; to demonstrate that the current social-political reality is a “necessary outcome” of the entire and especially of the more recent history of the Bulgarian people; to connect historical research with socialist practice; and to promote socialist patriotism and proletarian internationalism and Bulgarian-Soviet friendship. According to Todor Pavlov, in the final analysis “the history of our party proves to be the key for the correct understanding of our entire modern, and especially of our contemporary, history.”¹⁰ To summarize, in this concept historical science should take a class-and-party standpoint; accept a priori the postulates of the true doctrine about the “regularities” in history; be militant and educational; and at the same time claim to be scientific and to render a truthful historiographical account of the “course of history” directed toward communism.

The totalitarian communist regime used (and misused) the past for its legitimation, establishing ideological monopoly over the historical truth (acting as Orwell’s “Ministry of Truth”). The influence of politics over the historical knowledge, which exists elsewhere as well, assumed in this case very crude and directly ideological forms: preconceived historical “theses,” deliberate selection and even falsification of facts. The speeches and reports of the communist leaders Georgi Dimitrov, Vasil Kolarov, Vŭlko Chervenkov, and Todor Zhivkov contain many characterizations and assessments of historical events, personalities, and processes that automatically became mandatory and thus served as instructions about how to interpret history. Marxist historical science was thought of in quasi-military terms as a “historical front”; the historians had to “arm themselves” with the instruments of Marxism-Leninism-Stalinism, while some of the older “bourgeois” historians were denounced and others were subjected to ideological “re-education” by exposing their ideological, methodological, and political faults and “sins.”¹¹ The culmination of the Stalinist communist rewriting of the national history is the two-volume academic *History of Bulgaria* (1954–1955), reprinted in three volumes in 1961–1964 (presumably to correct the excesses of the “cult of personality”). The work on the writing of this official and “only true” history of Bulgaria included the

¹⁰ Todor Pavlov, “Za obektivnata i subektivnata,” 459. Similarly, Todor Pavlov, “Glavni zadachi,” 484.

¹¹ See the collection of documents: *Sŭdŭt nad istoritsite*. See also “Doklad na dr. V. Chervenkov pred V kongres na BKP” (Report of Comrade V. Chervenkov to the Fifth Congress of the Bulgarian Communist Party), *Istoricheski pregled* 5, no. 3–4 (1949): 331–371, esp. 361–363.

making of a “miniature model” with the correct theses, collective “discussions” of the model, “editing,” and coordination with Moscow.¹² Its theses and tenets became official and obligatory for a number of years.

The central meanings (and themes) of modern Bulgarian history from liberation (1878) onwards were formulated by Todor Pavlov (in the discussion of the model) thus: initial accumulation of capital and consolidation of capitalism; development of industry and the emergence of the Bulgarian working class with its revolutionary Marxist party; the proletariat gradually assuming a hegemonic role with regard to the poor and middle peasants; Bolshevization of the party and creation of an alliance between the workers and the peasants; and victory (with the help of the Soviet Union) of the dictatorship of the proletariat and construction of socialism. As unambiguously stated by this authority: “Everything else is anything else but a scientific history of Bulgaria, which, to repeat, is to a great extent a history precisely of the alliance of the Bulgarian working class and the laboring peasantry under the hegemony of the working class and the generally recognized leadership of the Bulgarian Communist Party.”¹³

This “Marxist” rewriting of the history of Bulgaria was traced in many works from the Bulgarian Stalinist (Dimitrov-Chervenkov) era on all of the previously treated topics. The “party truth” was achieved most fundamentally through the privileging of the Communist Party perspective in addressing historical developments, especially the agrarian movement, fascism and the anti-fascist struggle, the “people’s democracy” and the building of socialism; it was projected backwards to ensure the right attitude towards Russia from early on. Of course, this position and viewpoint legitimizes the ideas and deeds of the Communist Party and its rule, while the other viewpoints are not represented, or represented only residually and distortedly. In accordance with the (simplified) Marxist philosophy of history, the development was presented as “objective” in the sense of being independent of the human factor (and especially of “reactionary” forces), governed by laws (not subject to contingencies), and “progressive” (progressing toward socialism). The Marxist writing of history miraculously corresponds to, and even coincides with, the “course of history”; in communist historiography, truth announces itself plain and simple.

¹² See Todor Pavlov’s statement in discussing the “miniature model” of vol. 1 of the *History of Bulgaria*: Todor Pavlov, “Za marksicheska istoriya na Bŭlgariya,” 335–379.

¹³ Todor Pavlov, “Izkazvane pri obsŭzhdaneto na maketa na T. 2 ot ‘Istoriya na Bŭlgariya’” (Statement in the discussion of the model of vol. 2 of “History of Bulgaria”), *Istoriicheski pregled* 11, no. 4 (1955): 91–106, esp. 95, citation on 105.

The communist regime legitimized itself by using the past—more precisely, by portraying itself as the outcome of the struggle with odious fascism, in alliance with the peasants and the Agrarian Union (i.e., with the broadest possible popular support), and by relying on the only good foreign power (Russia/the Soviet Union). The legitimation was served by particular ideological constructs, such as the “unity of action” between the Communist Party and the Agrarian Union (and the rejection of the idea of peasant rule), the concept of a fascist regime (fascism in power), the monopoly of communism over “anti-fascism,” and the “second liberation” by the Soviet Union in 1944 (after the liberation in 1878 as a source of traditional gratitude). This, however, made Stambolov’s Russophobia unacceptable for the regime as improperly anti-Russian and still more improperly anti-Soviet “in projection.” The influence of politics manifested itself in the choice of particular topics (and the avoidance of others), the selection of facts, their treatment and ordering in “importance” (the methodological emphasis on singling out the “significant” from the insignificant is not accidental), and in sheer distortions and falsifications (exaggerating the partisan resistance; the false “testament” of Stamboliiski for a union with the communists). Even if the facts were true, they were crowned by the one-sidedness of the perspective, presented as “objective” and “truthful.” The communist regime was eager to conceal its militant “politics of history” and politicized history behind the veil of objectivity.

The communist perspective, supposedly left-wing and radical, was the official and dominant one. In making sense of the pre-communist era, the yardstick is thus revolutionary (state-subversive), but for the socialist era it turns abruptly into a (conservative) apology of the existing order. Yet the present studies attest to the availability of a moderate left to centrist perspective on the past in the course of the “revision” of the militant Stalinist scholarship and the further liberalization in the late socialist era. The national(ist) viewpoint (and standard of “judgment”) was relegated to the background for a time, but hardly ever disappeared. It made a comeback and, in time, was increasingly applied, though in specific ways (not to the Communist Party, and not to the Soviet Union) and with characteristic amnesia regarding some communist ideas and activities (especially concerning the “national question”). As the communist regime evolved toward nationalism, the national point of view became dominant on most questions in historiography. The irony is that nationalism, which brought a new legitimating resource to the regime, was regarded as almost dissidence.

Generally speaking, as socialism evolved, space opened up for “revision” of the initial formulations and for the simultaneous existence of

divergent opinions on many questions. A fitting example from this book is the gradual, step-by-step revision of the views on the political system during the interwar period—from assertions by hard-liners that the period was one of uninterrupted fascism, to identifying breaches in the allegedly fascist rule. However, some issues could not be touched. These were the most vital points of the regime's legitimation: the worker-peasant (and communist-agrarian) alliance under communist guidance (as a guarantee of its broad social basis, but also to neutralize agrarianism), the existence of a fascist regime (against which the communists had fought: heroic anti-fascism), the taboo on anything negative toward the Soviet Union (and Russia), and, of course, the self-presentation of socialist rule as the best possible social "order" (just, democratic, humane, and progressive).

One can find, though only in exceptional cases, direct confrontation with the "party truth." Thus in the first great discussion on fascism in 1968, Nikolai Genchev directly rejected the definition of fascism by Georgi Dimitrov as not only "incomplete, incorrect, and schematic," but also "based on current politics, propaganda, and hardly a scientific definition" and reacted against the use of "propaganda" and "journalistic" materials, including of the Communist Party and the Comintern, as a source for scholarly research.¹⁴ More cautiously, Dimitŭr Kosev remarked (in 1964) that the party documents should be used as historical sources not literally and on trust, but critically.¹⁵

It should be noted here that the Institute of the History of the Bulgarian Communist Party gradually became ghettoized. Apart from studying the history of the Communist Party, the Institute had to safeguard the party standpoint and truth in historical scholarship. But it remained increasingly isolated from the scholarly centers, where "serious" history was written; the party historians assembled there were looked down upon and had a reputation for dogmatism. From being a privileged domain and the main course of modern Bulgarian history, the history of the Communist Party turned into a specialized field, only partially intersecting with the "general" (mostly political) history of Bulgaria. The historians' presumed Marxism was increasingly reduced to statements of loyalty in forewords

¹⁴ Nikolai Genchev, "Nuzhni sa seriozni izsledvaniya na fashizma u nas" (Serious research on fascism in our country is needed), *Istoricheski pregled* 24, no. 4 (1968): 88–91, esp. 90–91.

¹⁵ Dimitŭr Kosev, "Za sŭstoyanieto i zadachite na bŭlgarskata istoricheska nauka" (On the state of affairs and tasks of Bulgarian historical science), *Istoricheski pregled* 20, no. 4 (1964): 3–39, esp. 26.

and concluding chapters, without consequence for the work itself. Yet the role of dogmatic methodology and philosophy of history in isolating Bulgarian historical scholarship from new trends in the West and in discouraging theoretical and methodological interest and innovation should not be underestimated.

Let us return to the methodology and the objectivity problem. The postulate of “party objectivity” from the Stalinist period understandably discouraged historians’ interest in methodological and theoretical problems of historical knowledge (which was not very strong in principle).¹⁶ Still, after a time, historians from the professional “guild” reappropriated the idea of objectivity of historical knowledge in order to put through some “revisionist” accounts at odds with the official ones (at a given moment). This represented a return to the positivist objectivity of the previous “bourgeois” era, which seeks the “truth” without problematizing the point of view (in practice mostly national).¹⁷ The ideal of positivist (but not Marxist) “objectivity” also indicates a striving of the historians toward autonomy from politico-ideological tutelage by asserting a professional standard of their own.

One can note in this connection a certain rehabilitation of “bourgeois historiography.” In a 1957 report on the development of historical scholarship in Bulgaria, Dimităr Kosev—a leading Marxist historian—pointed out the merits of “bourgeois” historians (whose works, by the way, were being used without attribution by many new historians), such as the discovery of a great number of sources and the accumulation of considerable empirical material, and said these historians were distinguished by their

¹⁶ In contrast to Snezhana Dimitrova, who is content with ascertaining the theoretical deficit in Bulgarian historical scholarship (such as scarcity of theory, lack of relations with the social sciences, and the absence of poststructuralist discursive trends and reflexivity), I am trying to find out what is there, even implicitly. See Snezhana Dimitrova, *Zhenite, istoriyata i nishto poveche* (Women, history, and nothing more) (Sofia: LIK, 2005), 64–76; Snezhana Dimitrova, “Kogato teoriyata na istoriyata se misli za izlishna” (When the theory of history is considered unnecessary), *Sotsiologicheski problemi* no. 1–2 (2005): 105–130.

¹⁷ Ilcho Dimitrov, *Vsichko teche. Spomeni* (Everything flows. Memoirs) (Sofia: Tiliya, 2000), 229. According to Dimitrov, the recognition of nationalism in Bulgaria created conditions for the historians to assert their understanding of “historical truth.” This was the “national truth.”

erudition, hard work, and command of foreign languages. They laid out important problems of medieval history and the Revival era in the spirit of bourgeois objectivism (here meant in a positive light) and left a valuable legacy. And historians like Ivan Shishmanov and Boyan Penev even took into account to some extent the role of material conditions and the class struggle. But as if to counterbalance the positive aspects, Kosev notes the “unscientific character” of these historians’ methodology, stating that it ended up distorting and falsifying Bulgarian history under the influence of fascist ideology and Great Bulgarian chauvinism (with Petūr Mutafov and Mikhail Arnaudov in particular).¹⁸

In the works of some socialist-era historians, one can find clues of a positivist understanding. But they remain no more than scattered phrases containing key words such as objective (not “subjective”), impartial (unbiased, unprejudiced), empirically proven (based on the sources, well attested), a balanced evaluation, and so on. It is rare to find a more developed declaration of a kind of positivist creed such as the following one (from Ilcho Dimitrov): the historian first discovers the facts, which are mostly found in archives, in all their plenitude. But there are all sorts of facts, and in the archives one can find evidence for all sorts of theses. This makes it necessary to sift the significant from the insignificant, what is crucial from what is secondary, the regularity from the contingencies, rather than making an arbitrary selection of facts and using them to distort the past through a preconceived and false historical narrative. Next the historian studies and analyzes the facts by taking account of the entire complex of causes, conditions, and circumstances. This should be done without bias (“subjectivism”), political considerations, preconceived “theses,” or a priori approaches. Then scientific inferences are made (“having in mind the options of the time... and which line was justified by the subsequent development”), which present the correct judgment of things, or, more strongly expressed—the objective (and whole) truth about them. If somebody reaches different inferences, obviously he was biased, prejudiced, “subjective,” or influenced by extra-scholarly (especially political) considerations.¹⁹ According to this view—to make it more explicit—the

¹⁸ Dimităr Kosev, “Razvitiето na istoricheskata nauka v Bŭlgariya sled pobedata na Velikata Oktomvriiska sotsialisticheska revolyutsiya” (The development of historical science in Bulgaria after the victory of the Great October Socialist Revolution), *Istoricheski pregled* 13, no. 6 (1957): 3–15, esp. 5–7.

¹⁹ Ilcho Dimitrov, “Profesor Bogdan Filov i negoviyat dnevnik” (Prof. Bogdan Filov and his diary), in Bogdan Filov, *Dnevnik* (Diary) (Sofia: Izdatelstvo na OF, 1990; first published 1986), 5–188, 115; Ilcho Dimitrov, “Delo na chisti hora” (A deed of pure per-

historical facts (sifted in the correct manner) can be viewed and assessed in an “objective” way, that is, independently of the standpoint of the viewer and without biases, to reach a unitary historical “truth,” or at least an approximation of such a thing. It remains unclear what criteria are to be used to sift the “important” from the “unimportant,” but it is especially problematic to turn “justification in subsequent developments,” in other words, political success, into a criterion for the correctness of the inferences (more on this later).

The historiographical essays in this book contain a number of examples of asserting “another truth” (mostly in the form of fighting “wrong theses”) during the course of the communist regime. One can point to the “creeping” vindication of Stambolov, the issue of Bulgaria’s participation in the Axis, the debates over the German “occupation,” Bagryanov’s attempt at a turnabout in foreign policy, and many others. In fact, it is exactly this step-by-step “dissent” that increased the interest of the wider public in Bulgarian history, perceived as a kind of substitute politics in the absence of real political dynamics, especially since the “stagnant” times of late socialism and the lack of economic competition and consumption opportunities left people with a lot of leisure time.

However, socialism did not lead to a shattering of the belief in “objective” truth and to a pluralistic notion of different views and “truths” about the same “object,” not to mention entirely relativistic “postmodern” ideas about historical knowledge. It is true that under communism, various views and evaluations of the same thing rarely existed simultaneously, and most often one “truth” was replaced by another (partly because of some form of censorship, partly because of subconscious pressure for “consensus”). But marshaled in a historiographical review, they seem arbitrary enough and closely follow the changing politics (hence the dictum, ascribed to Mikhail Pokrovski, that historical knowledge is “politics turned to the past”) to encourage even radical skepticism vis-à-vis historical knowledge, especially as regards its “scientificity” and “objectivity.” Why was the concept of a unitary and “objective” truth corresponding to a past state of affairs not shaken?

sons), in Ilcho Dimitrov, *Ravnosmetkata. Istoricheski ocherti i statii* (The balance sheet. Historical essays and articles) (Plovdiv: Hristo G. Danov, 1989), 88–113 (written in 1987), 91–92, 97, 113. See also Georgi Markov, *Bŭlgarskoto krushenie 1913* (The Bulgarian defeat, 1913) (Sofia: Izdatelstvo na BAN, 1991), 7. According to Markov, historical truth does not depend on one’s viewpoint and should be the same even for the belligerents in a war.

The belief in “historical truth” in the singular (if it is not just a question of the historian imposing his/her own opinion) is in my opinion understandable precisely for ideological regimes with a monopoly on the truth about themselves and “their” history. On one side is the protection of the officially imposed historical “truth” (on matters of importance for the regime) by the guardians of the status quo. On the other side is its challenging and contestation—as far as possible—in the name of another truth. The insistence on unitary truth has as a corollary the revolt against it in the name of truth again, though a different one. One cannot fight truth with something less dramatic (rhetorically and emotionally) than truth. The truth is one, but another one. The pluralism of views and interpretations is not topical here—it is for democratic societies.

An example of revolting against politically “opportunistic” and “nationally nihilistic” Bulgarian historiography in the name of truth is Nikolai Genchev’s polemical 1966 article “History—Teacher of Life, but When?” The point of this work is that historical scholarship should not bend to politics and be a servant to the “powerful of the day,” but should pursue and assert the truth about the past. The truth should not be falsified or distorted opportunistically in line with the interests of social groups and political power-holders. Moreover, the historian should reveal the “dark sides” of history, inconvenient facts and truths, as befits a mature nation, and not create a self-glorifying and “sentimental” image of the past. Positively viewed, national history should be used for national education and the building of national consciousness, while at the same time it should be viewed critically (not romantically) and without compromising the truth.²⁰

The truth that Genchev contrasted to the official Marxist historiography with its “party truth” was, so to say, the “national truth,” the truth from the national point of view. Of course, what is meant by truth here is not isolated facts, but their selection, ordering, and placing in a wider interpretative framework or picture of the past. Truth here is a synonym for a general viewing-comprehension of things, a certain “vision” of the past. This (implicitly national) truth was “oppositional” at that time, almost dissident, and it is not by chance that the article was suppressed in Bulgaria, but noted in the Western (French) press and correctly interpreted as

²⁰ Nikolai Genchev, “Istoriyata—uchitelka na zhivota, no koga?” (History—teacher of life, but when?) *Mladezh* no. 8 (1966), 4–9 (reprinted in Nikolai Genchev, *Nauchni trudove*, vol. 1 [Sofia: Gutenberg, 2003], 256–261). This article provoked the reaction of the Politburo and Zhivkov himself, and Genchev was criticized.

a symptom of emerging nationalism. Later on this perspective was incorporated by the regime and added to its legitimation. Until the end of his life, Genchev, the *bête noire* of the regime—both insider to it (with high-level connections) and a freethinker (punished more than once)—remained attached to this methodologically naïve, but combative, idea of historical truth. Truth here is clearly distinguished from lies, falsification, and distortion of the past in historical knowledge; he himself corrected a number of erroneous “theses” in his works.²¹

One should say that such a concept of truth, methodologically naïve as it might be, is extremely important in a situation in which intellectual freedom is absent and historical knowledge is directly used to legitimate the political power (ideology *strictu sensu*); it is the slogan of a struggle for emancipation of historical scholarship from ideology and of the historical community from political tutelage. This struggle had a measure of success in achieving the corporative autonomy of the historical profession in Bulgaria. But it loses its meaning in a democratic and pluralistic society, where the borderlines between knowledge and ideology also become blurred. Also, the new truths asserted as a result of too hot a confrontation with dogmatic “theses” retain a somewhat rigid quality (and too heavy a claim for truth) for the taste of freer times.

The idea of approaching national history scientifically and objectively, but at the same time with a feeling of being Bulgarian (“filially”), is advanced by Ilcho Dimitrov. He states that the pursuit of “a truth that enhances self-esteem” does not imply idealization, nostalgia, or romanticism, but goes hand in hand with lack of bias and prejudice.²² An unresolved, and unresolvable, question (as with Genchev above) is just how the patriotic approach is compatible with being “objective.” What if the “objective” study of the national past does not prove appropriate for educational purposes or enhancing national self-esteem? What if it reveals awkward “truths”? Genchev’s solution that these (the “dark sides”) should also be confronted as befits a mature people is not quite convincing, especially for nationalist historians; the preferred method is to suppress the uncomfortable facts and present a positive picture.

²¹ See his interviews in Nikolai Genchev, *Izbrani sŭchineniya* (Selected works), vol. 3, *Publitsistika* (Essays) (Sofia: Gutenberg, 2004), 107–118, 338–344, 369–374.

²² Ilcho Dimitrov, “Tsaryat umrya—da zhivee tsaryat!” (The king is dead—long live the king!). In Ilcho Dimitrov, *Mezhdū München i Potsdam. Bŭlgarskata politika prez Vtorata svetovna voina. Istoricheski ocherti* (Between Munich and Potsdam. Bulgarian politics during World War II. Historical essays) (Sofia: Universitetsko izdatelstvo “Sv. Kliment Okhridski,” 1998), 130–135 (written in 1966), esp. 131–132.

The direct challenge of the official theses and the fight for another truth in Bulgarian historiography under communism was an exception. Far more common was another reaction to dogmatism and official truths—the flight into empiricism and factual “objectivism.” As noted by some authors, empiricism and objectivism asserted themselves in the 1970s as a concept and a “style” of historical scholarship in Bulgarian historiography on modern and contemporary history (i.e., the ideologically most sensitive fields). A kind of “empiricist or objectivist school” emerged, which refrained from generalizations and assessments and preferred the “language of facts,” leaving the readers to judge for themselves. It is characterized by detailed, strictly factual studies (especially in political history), narrow specialization, and meticulous work with the documents, resulting in the production of “fragmented historical truths” (as Ivan Elenkov put it). Emblematic of this style is the historian Velichko Georgiev. Elenkov sees here the elaboration of principles of a certain professional canon, legitimation and assertion of the politically impartial expert status of the historian (including as an expert on historical truth), and a certain emancipation of the historical “guild.” According to him, this concept of history writing survived into post-communism and (now acting counterproductively) continues to reject as “unscientific” and ideologically suspect writings that fall outside the strictly empirical canon, affirmed as a professional ethos and reproduced by the institutions of historical knowledge.²³

Empiricism may only seem to be naïve, as when it is used to suggest ideas through the facts in counteracting (or circumventing) the official theses. But it may also be sincerely naïve and helpless: “pure” transcription of facts without interpretation or (because being entirely free of interpretation is hardly possible) without a clear message. Moreover, the facts as such are not resistant to ideological manipulation, as shown in the noto-

²³ Gospodinka Nikova, “Bŭlgaro-sŭvetskite ikonomicheski otnosheniya sled Vtorata svetovna voina (1949–1960)” (Bulgarian-Soviet economic relations after World War II), in *Bŭlgariya i Rusiya prez XX vek* (Bulgaria and Russia in the twentieth century) (Sofia: Gutenberg, 2000), 247–256, esp. 247; Vesela Chichovska, “V totalitarnite obshtestva nyama zashtiteni ot vremeto perimetri” (In totalitarian societies there are no spaces defended by time), in *Istoritsite za istinata, za nasiliyata, za sebe si* (Historians on truth, coercion, and themselves) (Sofia: Universitetsko izdatelstvo “Sv. Kliment Okhridski,” 1994), 238–263, esp. 242; Ivan Elenkov, “Debatŭt za fashizma sred istoritsite v Bŭlgariya prez XX vek—istoriografski kontekst i funktsii” (The debate on fascism among historians in Bulgaria in the twentieth century—historiographical context and functions). In *Ars inveniendi. Izsledvaniya v chest na Prof. Ivailo Znepolski* (Ars inveniendi. Studies in honor of Prof. Ivailo Znepolski), ed. Zhana Damyanova (Sofia: Universitetsko izdatelstvo “Sv. Kliment Okhridski,” 2002), 360–383, esp. 368–369, 371, 377–379.

rious concept of “unity of action” between Agrarians and communists, or the knee-jerk terminology of “fascism” and “anti-fascism,” which served merely as containers for pouring in facts. In any case, one cannot go far without some sort of theoretical construction (models, ideal types, some framework or perspective) to order and make sense of the facts, but also to look for relevant facts. An example from this book is the treatment of fascism, which made advances not when fed with isolated facts, but only with the building of institutional models and the use of theories. One should note in this connection that besides “empirical” historians, the Bulgarian historical community also had a few more theoretically minded (“constructivist”) and analytical historians (pointed out in the essays). One finds works in which, in the best positive tradition, hypotheses are being put forward, “facts” are analyzed and assessed, arguments are offered, events are placed into context, and perspectives are shifted.

The “backstage” picture of the production of historical knowledge under socialism is revealed in memoirs and interviews with historians. History (in both senses of the word) was “made” in the framework of certain institutions and included planned and scheduled tasks, discussions of the manuscripts before scientific councils, and scrutiny by reviewers and editing committees who acted as censors and had the right to interfere with the text (and sometimes mutilate it); hence there was self-censorship. Those overseeing ideological “correctness” held means of influence and pressure, such as stopping the publication of manuscripts (or having books destroyed after printing); warnings and threats; career obstacles (e.g., in getting hired for a job or becoming eligible for an academic degree); impediment of scholarly trips abroad; and various punishments, including the dismissal of the most recalcitrant. Informants of the secret services infiltrated the historical institutions, and a highly placed historian was responsible for them at the Central Committee. Historical “theses” had to be approved by ideological party authorities (especially in the initial period); later on, this was entrusted to internal mechanisms. There were “zones of silence” and taboo topics and such with obligatory interpretations. On some occasions historians were commissioned to produce special works, for instance, for the so-called “regenerative process,” that is, the campaign to assimilate the Turks. Scholarly work on certain topics was made more difficult, or impossible, because archive materials were classified (some archives were entirely inaccessible), and books were put off-limits in libraries’ “special collections,” not to mention that technology was poor.

On the other hand, the more open-minded and talented individuals in the scholarly community waged a continuous struggle against dogmatism

(most often in positions of authority); there was a wide range of worthy and unworthy conduct, of tolerant and intolerant people (by many accounts the “doyen” and highest placed of the historians, Dimitŭr Kosev, played a positive role). There was collegial and friendly support and signing petitions to rescue colleagues “in trouble,” and sometimes support came “from above.” Gradually a certain autonomization of the historical guild occurred, and the political influence became more indirect; material incentives and rewards (“buying”) replaced disciplinary punishments.²⁴ Of course, this took place in a generally unfree situation, in which serious compromises were made. As a result things are rarely black and white, but various shades of gray. All this should be taken into account when judging the quality of the historical production under communism in Bulgaria: what could be said, what only partly, what was just hinted at, and what was never mentioned at all.

While the historians in Bulgaria avoided direct confrontation with the questions of objectivity and historical truth (and preferred to substitute covertly the party viewpoint for the national one), this task was taken over by philosophers. The fight of the Marxist philosophy of history against its “bourgeois” counterpart was carried out mostly by Nikolai Iribadzhakov in an exemplary dogmatic style.²⁵ He works out the Marxist-Leninist position on the issue of “objective truth” in historical knowledge in the following manner: historical science (like every social science) has a class-party character and cannot be socially neutral, “above class,” “disinterested,” “above-party,” and the like. All bourgeois authors who affirm the opposite (including all “objectivists”) only conceal their bourgeois partisanship. But all those who admit the inevitable partisanship (*partiinnost*) of historical knowledge fall into subjectivism and relativism. Benedetto Croce, who believed that the liberal idea of freedom provides the most universal,

²⁴ The situation of historical scholarship under communism is described in the memoirs of historians such as Vera Mutaŭchieva, *Bivalitsi. Kniga vtora* (Things past. Book two) (Sofia: Anubis, 2001); Nikolai Genchev, *Spomeni* (Memoirs), *Izbrani proizvedeniya* (Selected works), vol. 5 (Sofia: Gutenberg, 2005); Ilcho Dimitrov, *Vsichko teche*. See also the collection of interviews with historians: *Istoritsite za istinata*. See also Mito Isusov, “Istoricheskata nauka i nashata sŭvremennost” (Historical science and our present), *Istoricheski pregled* 48, no. 1 (1991): 3–12.

²⁵ Nikolai Iribadzhakov, *Klio pred sŭda na burzhoaznata filosofiya* (Clio on trial by bourgeois philosophy) (Sofia: Partizdat, 1989; first published 1970), esp. 619–661.

above-party position in the writing of history is, in fact, a bourgeois ideology, because the idea of “freedom as such” is, in fact, a bourgeois idea. Only one type of partisanship (*partiinnost*) renders scientific and objectively true knowledge about the socio-historical reality and the laws of historical development. This is proletarian-communist partisanship, which expresses the interests of the proletariat, while bourgeois partisanship distorts the historical reality.

How is it possible, asks Iribadzhakov, that communist partisanship presupposes the objective truth and is even identical with it? How can the truth be both socially determined (what is true for one class is not for another class) and objective? The answer to this seeming paradox reads: the truthfulness of the Marxist truth ultimately stems from the progressiveness of the proletariat as a carrier of a new social formation (and liquidator of all forms of exploitation and repression), which in its struggles needs the objective truth; the interests of the proletariat require the objective truth and are identical with it. At the time when the bourgeoisie was a progressive and revolutionary class, its ideologists were also rendering a “more or less correct picture of the social reality,” but even then the bourgeoisie could not produce a truly scientific historiography because of its class limitations, stemming from its exploitative nature. Still more misleading is the picture of the reality given by the bourgeoisie, when it became a reactionary class. As Iribadzhakov puts it, there is “partisanship” (in quotes) and partisanship (without quotes); the former “denies or falsifies the objective truth in historical knowledge” while the latter “coincides with the objective truth and presupposes it.”²⁶

Iribadzhakov then takes issue with authors who criticize the exclusivity of the Marxist claim to objectivity and truth. According to him the bourgeois critics of the Marxist position (he mentions Johann Fischl and Friedrich Lange) present it in a distorted and caricatured form, such as: that the only true ideas are those that reflect reality in the minds of the proletariat; that the presumed sameness between Marxist teaching and objectivity is not rational, but rests on the belief that it is in tune with the course of history, in which the link with the proletariat guarantees the progressiveness of the doctrine; and finally, that the decision about which thought is proletarian and which is not is made by the Central Committee of the Communist Party. According to Iribadzhakov, this is all untrue. The criterion of truth for Marxism, including for the decisions of the central committees, is praxis, especially the revolutionary praxis (but not the bour-

²⁶ Ibid., 642.

geois pragmatism of utility). In this context is the following (somewhat casuistic) declaration of faith: Marxism is truthful not because it is useful to the proletariat and the socialist revolution, but the other way round, it is useful and serves the proletariat well because it is truthful. Iribadzhakov adduces Lenin's words—that Marx's teaching is all-powerful because it is true—to conclude that the power of Marxism is in its truthfulness.²⁷

In a somewhat different vein, according to Kiril Vasilev, historical science (and social science in general) are deeply and inevitably ideological, but this is not necessarily bad. The ideology is “more or less systematized and integrated philosophy and social theory,” and it includes knowledge and evaluations that lead to value orientations. The ideology can consist of distorted or illusionary views about the social world (as understood by Marx and Engels in *The German Ideology*), but it can be an adequate and truthful reflection of reality. The distorted reflection of reality is characteristic of social thought before the emergence of the scientific philosophy of Marxism, while the objectively true reflection is characteristic of Marxism. This is so because the interests of the (working) class, reflected in Marxism as its ideology, coincide with the actual course of events. But not everything in historical knowledge is ideology. For example, the primary information (facts, figures, dates) as a purely empirical matter does not express a class viewpoint and is not ideology. The ideology is present in the explanatory functions, in the value judgment towards the world, and it is interwoven into the very fabric of the historical knowledge. In a certain contradiction with the previous statements, Vasilev affirms that historical knowledge contains some non-class, universally human characteristics and interpretations.²⁸

The issue of the “relations between objectivity and subjectivity” in the historical science is tackled by the methodologist Zhelyazko Stoyanov. Here again the basic Marxist postulates are present: history as a class science; the interests of the progressive classes as a “mighty factor for the objective reflection of the past”; and communist partisanship as the “highest form of partisanship in the science of history,” which defends the interests of the proletariat and contributes to the truthful reflection of the past. But the tone as a whole is different, with no militancy against the Western authors. It is also admitted that partisanship (reinterpreted as the ideological-worldview attitudes of the historian) does not determine the

²⁷ Ibid., 627–631.

²⁸ Kiril Vasilev, “Istoriya i ideologiya” (History and ideology), in *Pomoshtni istoricheski disziplini* (Auxiliary historical disciplines), vol. 3 (Sofia, 1981), 10–33, esp. 14–17, 31.

outcome of the research entirely; moreover, some historical knowledge is partly independent of the class-party identity of the historian. Hence bourgeois historiography, independent of its reactionary party positions, may yield truthful knowledge of the past. Conversely, progressive ideological-theoretical views do not automatically guarantee the success of historical works (authors who profess progressive social-political ideals may create mediocre works). Furthermore, Stoyanov allows for the impact of the present in making sense of the past with the consequence of a certain “relativity of the absolute truth.” This is argued by the fact that the consequences of past and present events are experienced in the future, and making sense of them remains incomplete in the present; moreover, future generations will have their own view on the past and will write the history in their own ways and from new perspectives; yet (in contradiction to the above) the relativity of knowledge is not absolute, and knowledge is accumulated on the way to reaching “absolute truthful knowledge.” Finally and significantly, Stoyanov believes that communist partisanship shows the way to a “successful combination between the class and the national [standpoint] in the process of historical knowledge.”²⁹

The apparent stability of the socialist regime over time and the lack of overt dynamics created the feeling of conclusiveness and finality, a sort of “end of history.” It was as if the point had been reached beyond which no radical change was possible. And it is from here that a final assessment of the past can be made. This feeling reinforced the positivist notions of objectivity and historical truth and predisposed some Bulgarian historians toward the idea (quite common in past eras) that historical scholarship represents some quasi-judicial “court” (“court of history,” “court of the generations”), which dispenses (moral) justice, punishes or acquits, blames or praises the historical actors and their deeds.³⁰ Moreover, the historical “sentence” is passed in view of the consequences of certain ac-

²⁹ Zhelyazko Stoyanov, “Problemüt za vzaimovrúzkata mezhdu obektivnostta i subektivnostta v istoricheskoto poznanie” (The problem of the relation between objectivity and subjectivity in historical knowledge), in *Metodologicheski i istoriografski problemi na istoricheskata nauka* (Methodological and historiographical problems of historical science), vol. 4 (Sofia: Izdatelstvo na BAN, 1990), 34–51.

³⁰ On the court of history, see Ilcho Dimitrov, “Prof. Bodgdan Filov,” 9, 13, 80, 188; Ilcho Dimitrov, *Ivan Bagryanov. Tsaredvoret, politik, dŭrzhavnik* (Ivan Bagryanov. Courtier, politician, statesman) (Sofia: Akademichno izdatelstvo “Prof. Marin Drinov,” 1995), 87. See also Andrei Pantev, “Vidyan otblizo i dalech” (Seen from close up and afar), in *Stefan Stambolov—revolyutsioner i knizhovnik* (Stefan Stambolov—revolutionary and man of letters). Veliko Tŭrnovo, 1987, 17–27, esp. 17.

tions (especially political), which turn out to be correct or mistaken in retrospect from the absolute present. It was even directly suggested that the scholarly study of the past should take the subsequent course of history—in other words, which tendency asserted itself—as orientation in judging what “proved itself” (or “justified itself”) historically.³¹

But time cannot be stopped, and the present will eventually become history. The notion of a “conclusive verdict” leads to the ludicrous results seen in many examples from the previous essays, where the victory of communism seemed final and provided the “last instance” of justice over the past. Among the consequences is also the very human fact that many historians who lived to see the end of the system changed their views. Contrary to their previous severity toward failed tendencies, some urged that socialism not be judged too severely and that the idealistic intentions of its creators be recognized and credited. In fact, the work of the historian is better described through the metaphor of a “dialogue with the past,” with the idea that various questions will be posed to the past and that this dialogue will go on without presumption of finality.

The fall of socialism and the contestation of its legitimacy initiated a “new reading” of the past and a “rewriting of history.” The rewriting, stemming from the abrupt change in the present, is understandably maligned by many historians who established their reputations and made careers in the previous era. These historians see the rewriting as an indiscriminate negation of the established truths, replacement of old dogmas with new ones, a quickly made change from “plus” to “minus” (i.e., without new research), and the like.³² And, of course, they see it as politically motivated.

In a very pragmatic and instrumental interpretation, the sociologist Andrei Bundzhulov says the “decommunizing rewriting” of the contem-

³¹ Ilcho Dimitrov, “Zakluchitelni dumi” (Concluding words), in *Stefan Stambolov—revolyutsioner i knizhovnik*, 173–183, esp. 174, 182; Ilcho Dimitrov, “Deveti septemvri v bŭlgarskata istoriya” (September Ninth in Bulgarian history), in Ilcho Dimitrov, *Mezhdŭ München i Potsdam*, 189–197, esp. 190, 192, 197; Ilcho Dimitrov, “Delo na chisti hora,” 97, 102–103, 113.

³² Ilcho Dimitrov, “Za nov pročit na istoriyata ili za novi izsledvaniya” (For a new reading of history or for new research), in Ilcho Dimitrov, *Trevogi..., Upovaniya...* (Concerns..., Hopes...) (Sofia: Universitetsko izdatelstvo “Sv. Kliment Okhridski,” 2005), 184–198, esp. 184–185; Dimitŭr Sirkov, “Istoriya i politika” (History and politics), *Minalo* 3, no. 1 (1996), 75–83, esp. 78.

porary history of Bulgaria can be explained by the political struggles between the elites. History functions as a resource for political legitimation in the struggles between the “old former people” (those repressed, dissidents) and the “new former people” (those in power until recently) and satisfies the need for identity of the (new) parties and elites. Hence the rivalry between interpretations—“the combat (or war) over the past.” According to this author, the de-communizing rewriting takes the form of discarding the former ideological precepts and “purification” from the silt of Marxist-Leninist doctrine—“de-ideologization.” In a deeper “inversion of the world” it affects the whole perspective, the way of seeing historical “facts,” “heroes,” and “events.” The rewriting imposes a new “normalization”; it shifts and redistributes qualifications such as just/unjust or progressive/reactionary. In the history textbooks in particular, new “hidden agendas” are being instilled. According to this author, the rewriting takes place in implicit or explicit polemics with communist rewriting, and takes up, in fact, the little “diversions” from the doctrinal nucleus that already emerged during socialist times.³³

The historiographical essays in this volume show what exactly the rewriting consists of, especially concerning the most sensitive (and taboo) issues of the “old regime.” It was also shown that some “revisions” were outlined in the preceding years, but not everything was reinterpreted, and the reinterpretation was limited. On a deeper level the “new” reading of the past includes not only reassessments, but a change of perspective and of the narrator’s voice. But what is of interest here is: how does the rewriting reflect upon the problem of historical truth and objectivity?

One can note that turning from some “truths” to others, and even to completely opposite truths (in the sense of a different vision) in the politically polarized Bulgarian society of the “transition” period, was not conducive to a relativizing of the idea of truth. The rewriting of history took place precisely in the name of “restoration of the truth” (closely connected with doing justice). It is ironic that precisely those authors who authoritatively set the interpretation of modern history before the changes now embraced a certain relativization of truth and reassessment of objectivity. For example, Ilcho Dimitrov relativized the notion of historical truth with regard to the significance of September 9, 1944: “There are events and personalities that are bound to remain controver-

³³ Andrei Bundzhulov, “Bitkata za minaloto” (The battle over the past), in *Litsa na vremeto* (Faces of the times), vol. 1 (Sofia: Tsentŭr za istoricheski i politologicheski izsledvaniya, 1996), 157–168.

sial both for the people and for scholarship. [...] Neither the power-holders nor parties or personalities can decree what is true and what is not. The past is the object of historical science. In it there are no final and still less official and mandatory truths.”³⁴ Mito Isusov, director of the Institute of History at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, noted the “polivariance of the approaches to the multi-faceted historical truth” in a report on the state of historical science in Bulgaria.³⁵ But as one can see, these are quite timid statements.

“Objectivism” came under attack in favor of allowing for the “subjectivity” and biases of the historian. Thus in defending his admiration for Stambolov, the historian Andrei Pantev objected to the condemnation of biases in historical scholarship. As he put it, in working with the “fossils of the past, nobody is immune from projecting upon them his own political and personal preferences, often without being aware of it.”³⁶

Contrary to the tendency to overvalue public and official documents as the most objective and representative historical “sources,” some historians came to prize the memoir genre highly. What they appreciate about memoirs is precisely their “subjectivism,” the feeling for the *zeitgeist*, a certain wholeness (in contrast to the more fragmentary official documents), and access to individual and social psychology. Besides, as Ilcho Dimitrov (editor of many memoirs) pointed out, official documents can be no less “subjective” and one-sided.³⁷ Here again a certain reaction against the objectivist paradigm is discernible.

One can note parenthetically that the debatable and not quite productive dichotomy “objective/subjective” in historical scholarship can be reformulated in phenomenological terms as meanings of a “first” and “second” (if

³⁴ Ilcho Dimitrov, “Polovin vek po-kŭsno” (Half a century later), in Ilcho Dimitrov, *Mezhdŭ München i Potsdam*, 198–213, esp. 213.

³⁵ Mito Isusov, “Istoricheskata nauka,” 10.

³⁶ Andrei Pantev, *Stefan Stambolov. V chasa na Bŭlgariya* (Stefan Stambolov. In the hour of Bulgaria) (Sofia: Edem, 1995), 136. Also Ilcho Dimitrov, “Izborŭt mi e predreshen. Intervyu” (My choice is predetermined. An interview), in *Istoriĕt. Grazhdanin i uchen. Sbornik v chest na akademik Ilcho Dimitrov* (The historian. Citizen and scholar. Collection in honor of academician Ilcho Dimitrov) (Sofia: Universitetsko izdatelstvo “Sv. Kliment Okhrdski,” 2001), 20–23, esp. 21.

³⁷ Ilcho Dimitrov, “Georgi Dimitrov i negoviyat dnevnik” (Georgi Dimitrov and his diary), in Ilcho Dimitrov, *Ochevidtsi i izsledvachi* (Witnesses and researchers) (Sofia: Izdatelstvo na Sofiiskaya universitet “Sv. Kliment Okhrdski,” 2005), 400–462, esp. 400–404. Also Stoicho Grŭncharov, *Politicheskite sili i monarkhicheskiya institut v Bŭlgariya 1886–1894* (The political forces and the institution of the monarchy in Bulgaria, 1886–1894) (Sofia: Nauka i izkustvo, 1984), 9–10.

necessary—a “third”) order, internal or external to the “life world” of the historical actors, cotemporary or later. From this point of view historical knowledge creates meanings that build upon, and modify, the meanings of the happenings for the historical actors and their close contemporaries, who lived through them. Thus historical knowledge makes sense of what had been made sense of already; it interprets the interpretations. As with the cultural anthropologist, the meanings and interpretations of the historian are “secondary” and “external” (“etic”), while the meaning for the actors (agents) is by definition “primary” or “internal” (“emic”) and somewhat more “lateral” for the contemporaries; the meaning undergoes further modifications in the later memoirs of contemporaries. The historian’s position as an external (and later) interpreter, and not a participant (not even a participant observer) of the events, makes him/her presumably more neutral and in this sense “objective,” or better, “impartial.” One can “objectify” (make into an object) the events because one is not “in the game” and not immersed in the “subjectivism” of relations and passions. For that reason it is better to avoid taking up the “primary” meanings in a naïve and uncritical manner. To take an example from this book, we cannot expect to advance our knowledge if today’s historians take up the struggle between Russophiles and Russophobes with the same fervor and partisan blindness as contemporary observers did. Historical knowledge presents, in fact, an alloy of “primary” and “secondary” meanings, of an “internal” point of view of participants and contemporaries and an “external” point of view of historians, distanced in time, professionally trained, and equipped with the instruments of their trade.³⁸ On second thought, it is not an alloy—because no formula of composition or recipe for preparation can be given—but an interplay, perhaps a dialogue. Historical interpretation takes up meanings and builds upon them new meanings...

Let us elaborate on the example of Russophobia in post-liberation Bulgarian history. For Stambolov and his adherents, the negative attitude toward Russia was an expression of (Bulgarian) patriotism, while their adversaries saw in it mainly a pretext for establishing a dictatorship. For their part, the historians, earlier and later, added interpretations of Russo-

³⁸ The beginnings of sociological phenomenology of the “life world” in Alfred Schütz, *Der Sinnhafte Aufbau des sozialen Welt* (Vienna, 1960; first published 1932). Also Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise on the Sociology of Knowledge* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1966). On the understanding of the Other in anthropology: Clifford Geertz, “From the Native’s Point of View: On the Nature of Anthropological Understanding,” in Clifford Geertz, *Local Knowledge: Further Essays in Interpretative Anthropology* (New York: Basic Books), 55–72.

phobia such as “apparent hatred” of Russia (imposed by the circumstances); “actual hatred” transmitted from previous experiences; a “love-hate” reaction (in a psychological sense) with efforts toward reconciliation; “a rejection of the father” (in a psychoanalytical sense) upon reaching national maturity; false patriotism, which conceals Austrophilia, and even anti-Bulgarianism; misguided nationalism, out of stubbornness and nonsensical opposition; flexible tactics and maneuvering; real patriotism that outlived its expedience and utility, and so on. Apart from that, there was the question of whom the negative attitude was directed against—against “everything Russian,” including the Russian people; against the official Russia of tsarism; or against Russian policy toward Bulgaria. Meanings upon meanings upon meanings. Which is the “objective” and the “subjective” here? Is there a “correct” or “objective” interpretation that is independent from the observer (be it historical agent or historian)? More disturbing still (for the objectivist paradigm): why should the historian’s interpretation enjoy a privileged status? If so, which of all the interpretations offered by historians should it be? Without affirming the need for a special “interpretative” historical trend, understood as the study of meanings and interpretations (which, in a way, is what the history of historiography does), Bulgarian historiography has not yet sufficiently acknowledged the interpretative aspect of historical scholarship that also dissolves the dichotomy “subjective”/“objective.”

With few exceptions, Bulgarian historiography is still dominated by classical positivist notions of historical objectivity, formulated by one author as conscientiousness and honesty, mastery of the field, adequate interpretation, and mental reconstruction on the basis of the sources and in the framework of a given conceptual approach to the past reality (which is thus more or less adequately “reflected”). The historian should not distort, manipulate, or falsify the sources in the interest of social or political groups; should not be guided by his/her own sympathies and preferences; and should remain politically neutral in the scholarly text. According to the same author, it is enough to remove the “opportunist untruth” for the “objective truth” to shine, though he admits that the “dictatorship of opportunism” continued in Bulgaria after the fall of communism in 1989. But the truth in general can be achieved by rigorous application of the scientific methods of research and the requirements of scholarly ethics.³⁹

³⁹ Stoyan Tanev, “Obektivnata istina i konyunkturnata neistina v süvremennata bülgarska istoriya” (Objective truth and subjective untruth in modern Bulgarian historiography), in *Predizvikelstvata na promyanata* (The challenges of the change), ed. Iskra

One occasionally encounters Rankean claims that historical knowledge should “represent the historical process as it had been, unadulterated and unadjusted.”⁴⁰

The objectivity question in historical scholarship is set against a broad background by the philosopher Vasil Prodanov. He points to two major currents and stages in the philosophy of science: modernist universalism and relativist postmodernism. Modernist universalism, he says, is characterized by epistemological naturalism (as a theory of knowledge), that is, the belief in unitary methods in the natural and the social sciences (exemplified by the positivism of the nineteenth century and the analytical philosophy of the 1950s and 1960s). Relativist postmodernism, he says, is characterized by epistemological anti-naturalism, which affirms the fundamental difference between social and natural reality, hence different methods (neo-Kantianism, the hermeneutic, the linguistic turn). Prodanov then ambitiously seeks to make his way between the Scylla of naturalism and the Charybdis of anti-naturalism and the still more difficult task of combining objective truth with relativism in historical knowledge. He points to several attempts at such a solution in the social sciences and historiography, such as Max Weber’s attempt to combine (hermeneutic) “understanding” with (causal) “explanation,” and the new critical realism and the new philosophy of history (Frank Ankersmit). Unfortunately, Prodanov’s own “synthesis between the extremes of positivist naturalism and postmodernist relativism,” promoted as a recipe for “how to achieve objectivity and truth in historical knowledge,” is hardly convincing. In the questionable effort to make use of all philosophical concepts of truth (correspondent, pragmatic, etc.) simultaneously, the recipe turns out to be a hodgepodge of the historian’s usual obligations: to collect a great deal of facts, to treat them with empirical and quantitative methods, to assemble the facts into a system, to take into account the motivation and values of the historical actors, and to conform to the standards of scientificity of the professional community plus some quite strange requirements, such as to take part in the symbolic construction of present-day realities and the achievement of certain goals, to foster identities, and to legitimize and de-

Baeva and Plamen Mitev (Sofia: Universitetsko izdatelstvo “Sv. Kliment Okhridski,” 2006), 308–323, esp. 308–310, 320; Stoyan Tanev, “Obektivnost i konyunktura v sŭvremennata bŭlgarska istoriya” (Objectivity and opportunism in modern Bulgarian historiography). In *Bŭlgariya sled 1944—istoriya, problemi, tendentsii* (Bulgaria after 1944—history, problems, tendencies), ed. Stoyan Tanev and Vladimir Migevev (Shumen: Antos, 2002), 5–12.

⁴⁰ Sirkov, “Istoriya i politika,” 75.

legitimize social arrangements (obviously flowing from the pragmatic understanding of truth).⁴¹

The historian Georgi Markov (current director of the Institute of History) recently published a philosophical-historical essay guided by the idea that the “philosophy of history” is better worked out by historians than left to philosophers.⁴² In spite of the fragmented account and the metaphorical style, the work is entirely in the spirit of nineteenth-century historicism with a strong Hegelian influence. History is understood as mainly military-political history, with admiration for the “great historical personalities” (military commanders, politicians, philosophers, and scholars) and attention to “great events” in the lives of nations. From the plenitude and multiplicity of the past, only they deserve the name History (written by Markov with a capital “H” without a trace of irony, and without differentiating between historical events and the writing about them). By contrast, “everyday life” is not significant, and nothing is lost if it goes into oblivion.⁴³

Markov’s “philosophy of history” is progressist, metaphysical (a terrain of above-empirical regularities and factors), and extremely deterministic. The real “subject” of History is peoples (nations), and it is driven by great personalities, not classes, while the nations by themselves are rather inert. History is understood as a meaningful process, and not just a causal sequence of events; in general it is “progressive,” though certain nations stagnate or fall behind. History (endowed with quasi-subjectivity and agency) changes the eras and moves toward the next goal (or “peak”); its course can be delayed or even changed, but not reversed. History is driven by “historical necessity,” which reigns over contingencies and even over regularities and without conforming to the whims of personalities, “who emerge and disappear following its rigorous and inexorable laws.” If an event becomes necessary, it happens exactly when required by History, and it is led by great personalities.⁴⁴ On the other hand (and somewhat in contradiction with the previous), History is made by the great personalities, who “drive History aided by the energy of the nations”; to

⁴¹ Vasil Prodanov, “Diskusiite za obektivnostta i istinata v istoricheskoto poznanie” (The discussions on objectivity and truth in historical knowledge), in *Istoricheskata nauka v Bŭlgariya—sŭstoyanie i perspektivi* (Historical science in Bulgaria—state of affairs and prospects), ed. Antoaneta Zapryanova, Blagovest Nyagulov, and Iliyana Marcheva (Sofia: Institut po istoriya pri BAN, 2006), 49–65.

⁴² Georgi Markov, *Lyubomŭdrie na istoriyata* (The wisdom of history) (Sofia: Izdatelstvo “Zakhari Stoyanov,” 2008), 11–13, 23.

⁴³ Ibid., 243–249, 256, 267, 283, 292–293, 302–303.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 132–133, 348, 350.

ordinary people History only happens. The great personalities are produced by the nation according to the demands of the era, and they serve as its leaders; the leaders are of the type the people deserve (as Hegel puts it)—democrats or dictators, honest people or charlatans. Besides, History is made by the great nations, while the smaller ones appear on its pages only accidentally.⁴⁵ One may see in such a “philosophy of history” a reaction against vulgar historical materialism with its classes, class struggles, and the underestimation of personalities and nations, but the concept is strikingly outdated.

What is of interest here is Markov’s concept of historical truth. As can be surmised, it is absolutist. The unitary and complete (or full) Truth, characteristically written with a capital T, is independent of viewpoints and of the present moment. The truth cannot be a half-truth (because this is already a lie), and it is not necessarily “in the middle.” The Truth is the lodestar of the researcher in ordering the chaos of the past; it is also a “dream of the historian, who tries all his life to approach it and come to know it.” The power-holders try to distort the truth as it suits them and to erase the undesirable past, but the historian should tell “the whole truth” and not give in to them. There can be several viewpoints on the same event, but not several truths; the change of viewpoint is a “change in lighting,” which allows us to see the truth more clearly, but it remains “the same as before we came to know it.” Every generation has “its own truth” for the time it lives through, but the historian discovers the contradictions between that and “the other truth” (which, it is implied, is the eternal one).⁴⁶

A guarantee for the truth is the purity of the “source” (i.e., archives and documents), from which the historian draws; “the historian should drink water directly from the source, because downriver it may be muddied”; it is important that “the sources never dry and be as clear as Clio’s tears.”⁴⁷ In other words, what is asserted here is the Truth of the document and of the “facts” drawn from it, not what it means or how it is interpreted; the word “interpretation” does not appear a single time in the whole book. The work of this (otherwise good) military historian can be read as a manifesto of the (arch-)traditionalism among the Bulgarian historical guild. In fact, it goes way too far, but in this exaggerated manner it captures characteristic features of Bulgarian historical scholarship in its tradi-

⁴⁵ Ibid., 319, 334–335, 342–343.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 43, 51–55, 58, 386.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 152, 158–159, 181.

tional and still-dominant form: a fascination with (archival) sources, an emphasis on the political history of events and personalities, a belief in unitary truth (even if hard to reach and only in approximation), and a treatment of the nation as the main subject of history.

Perhaps more important than the (rather atypical) philosophical and methodological considerations is the practice of history. Blagovest Nyagulov reveals two approaches to the past in Bulgarian historical scholarship: traditionalist and innovative. The traditionalists approach national history in a “constructivist” manner and, in the spirit of positivism, strive to establish the “truth” of the national past through a critical analysis of the archival sources. The “construction” of the national historical narrative (on particular topics) in accordance with the ideology of nationalism is based upon the theses of the nation’s antiquity, past glory, heroism, and victimization; the unity of the national community; and historical continuity. The innovators, in turn, make use of deconstructionist approaches, postmodern discursive analysis, and alternative sources of historical information in order to show the relativity of the established historical truths (and even challenge the notion that the past can be known). The “deconstruction” is more in tune with liberalism and underlines difference, individuality, and discontinuities.⁴⁸

According to my observations as well, some authors arrive at a certain relativism and erosion of the notions of “objectivism” and (unitary) “truth.” This may be the result of discursive analysis, which sets aside historical reality to study how it is being spoken of (or rather, affirms that historical reality cannot be separated from how it is being spoken of), or of “oral history,” which questions and disintegrates and sometimes ridicules the meaning of the grand narratives from a “private” point of view, or of “ethnographic” (micro-)history, which subverts generalizations. The history of historiography practiced here is also a kind of discursive analysis. But these are not radical (absolute) relativizations of historical knowledge, still less a denial that the past is knowable (as may appear to traditional positivism); “deconstruction” itself is not practiced in the most radical manner, but rather to reveal the conditions and assumptions of the “constructs.” On the other hand, there has undeniably been a certain weakening, shaking, and relativization of some elements in the objectivity-truth complex of notions. Especially threatening to traditional positiv-

⁴⁸ Blagovest Nyagulov, “Natsionalnata istoriya v süvremenniya evropeiski kontekst” (National history in the contemporary European context), in *Istoricheskata nauka v Bŭlgariya*, 149–162, esp. 151–153.

ism is that the relativization affects precisely the truths of national history, which is considered sacred.

The idea of unitary “objective” truth can be radically challenged from a feminist point of view or from the standpoint of minorities. The feminist perspective began to make inroads in Bulgarian historical scholarship alongside women’s history topics—women’s struggles for emancipation, identities, images, and representations⁴⁹—and a history of minorities is also being written and championed.⁵⁰ This is still a “complementary” history of women or minorities, who have been neglected so far in historical narratives, or a presentation of some issues from women’s point of view at the most, rather than radicalization to an exclusively female or minority way of viewing (and experiencing) things and rejection of mainstream historiography as “phallogocentric” or “racist.” But even thus the objectivist paradigm is being undermined through the open manifestation of biases and “taking sides.”

Finally, the monopoly of the historical “guild” over historical knowledge (and thus upon the historical “truths”), generally maintained before and during socialism, was broken in a flagrant manner. In democratic conditions and using the power of the media, various manipulators and

⁴⁹ Krassimira Daskalova, “Bŭlgarskite zheni v sotsialni dvizheniya, zakoni i diskursi, 1840–1940 (Bulgarian women in social movements, laws, and discourses, 1840–1940), in *Ot syankata na istoriyata. Zhenite v bŭlgarskoto obshtestvo i kultura* (From the shadow of history. Women in Bulgarian society and culture), ed. Krassimira Daskalova (Sofia: Dom na naukite za choveka i obshtestvoto, 1998), 11–41; Krassimira Daskalova, “Smislite na grazhdanstvoto: grazhdani i grazhdanski prava v Bŭlgariya, 1878–1944” (The meanings of citizenship: citizens and civil rights in Bulgaria, 1878–1944), in *Granitsi na grazhdanstvoto: evropeiskite zheni mezhdu traditsiyata i modernostta* (Limits of citizenship: European women between tradition and modernity) (Sofia: LIK, 2001), 226–243; Krassimira Daskalova, “Zhenskata identichnost: normi, predstavi, obrazi v bŭlgarskata kultura (XIX–XX vek)” (Women’s identities: norms, representations, images in Bulgarian culture in the nineteenth and twentieth century), in *Balkanski identichnosti v bŭlgarskata kultura ot modernata epokha, XIX–nachaloto na XX vek* (Balkan identities in Bulgarian culture in the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century), vol. 2, Sofia, 2002; Margarita Cholakova, *Bŭlgarskoto zhensko dvizhenie, 1857–1878* (The Bulgarian women’s movement, 1857–1878) (Sofia: Albo, 1994).

⁵⁰ Antonina Zhelyazkova, *Razprostraneniето na islyama v zapadnobŭlgarskite zemi pod osmanska vlast XV–XVIII v.* (The spread of Islam in the western Bulgarian lands from the fifteenth to the eighteenth century) (Sofia: Izdatelstvo na BAN, 1990); Antonina Zhelyazkova, Bozhidar Aleksiev, and Zhorzheta Nazŭrska, *Myusyulmanskite obshnosti na Balkanite i v Bŭlgariya* (Muslim communities in the Balkans and in Bulgaria) (Sofia: IMIR, 1997); Zhorzheta Nazŭrska, *Bŭlgarskata dŭrzhava i neinite maltsinstva, 1879–1885* (The Bulgarian state and its minorities, 1879–1885) (Sofia: LIK, 1999).

leaders of public opinion—such as popularizers of history on television, journalists, and political lobbyists—intervened strongly in the knowledge of the past to pursue their own agendas. This so-called “public use of history” in the electronic and printed media and directly before large audiences (meetings, press conferences, etc.) not only pushed aside the professional historians and depreciated specialized historiography, but replaced even the traditional popularizing textbooks. Such treatments of the past are typically characterized by one-sidedness, sensationalism, and political partisanship. Various “truths” (in fact, myths) on issues of Bulgarian history from the most ancient to the most recent are announced in the public space in a strongly nationalist spirit and language.⁵¹ This is particularly true of the fantasy contributions of amateur historians to the history of the proto-Bulgarians. Professional historians remain powerless before the onslaught on “their” territory, while the few who appear in the media conform with the public’s expectations.⁵² This has nothing to do with presenting history in a vivid, popularizing way by expert historians on the History Channel. As a result the very idea of history and of the historian’s profession among the public are shaped on the image of pseudo-professionals, amateurs, and outright charlatans.

A certain idea of truth corresponds to amateurish incursions in history. To make it explicit, it consists of the following: the truth is simple and one-dimensional, it “speaks” through a given (isolated) fact, as if collated to it. The fact itself is sacred and does not allow for different interpretations. The fact is such “by nature,” and one does not ask for the source it comes from or how it was constructed. A more complex picture of the circumstances and the context is excluded—the isolated fact presents a self-sufficient and conclusive “argument” and “proof.” The fact-truth tar-

⁵¹ A Bulgarian example was the “Batak case,” when a scholarly project aimed at considering the presentation (and myth-making) in images and narratives of the massacre in Batak (1876) became a target of nationalistic accusations of a “negation of the Holocaust” in Batak. Not only was history again manipulated for political purposes, but the attack against the authority of the historians concerning historical knowledge came from outside the historical guild and divided it.

⁵² See Nikolai Poppetrov, *Clio ex machina. Za publichnata upotreba na istoriyata v prekhodno vreme* (Clio ex machina. On the public use of history in transitional times), in *Istoricheskata nauka v Bŭlgariya*, 277–285; Nikolai Poppetrov, “Istoricheska nauka i obshtestvo. Aspekti na konfiguratsiyata: medii—obshtestvo—iztochnik na istoricheski znaniya” (Historical science and society. Aspects of the configuration: media—society—source of historical knowledge), in *Predizvikatelstvata na promyanata*, 262–275. See also Ivan Ilchev, “Chalgata v bŭlgarskata istoriya” (The chлга [a kind of folk music—R.D.] in Bulgarian history), in *Predizvikatelstvata na promyanata*, 41–44.

gets value judgments of the public, especially nationalistic ones, and draws its force from them.

The historian Nikolai Poppetrov sees in the “public misuse” of history a breach of the traditional symbiosis between historical scholarship and the public (and politics), in which historical knowledge was entrusted with important social functions and the historians acted as mentors, educators, and propagandists at the service of the national idea at least since 1927 (the 1,000th anniversary of the death of the Bulgarian king Simeon) or at the service of the communist regime for its legitimation and the communist education of the public (after 1944). Common to the eras before and after 1944, regardless of ideology, was a clear differentiation between historical science on the one hand and popularization, historical journalism, and historical fiction on the other, while amateur work was viewed critically and censored. After 1989 historical scholarship became unnecessary for ideological purposes, and the clear-cut boundaries between the fields became blurred—the historians lost their monopoly over the past, and amateurs freely invaded the field. The community of historians walled itself off; it severed communications with the public, either because of a lack of communicative skills and unwillingness to enter a broader dialogue, or because of arrogance. It isolated itself even from parallel scholarly initiatives of private research centers and networks.⁵³ This “diagnosis” seems correct to me, provided that the continuity of the nationalistic discourse is stressed, taken to the extreme by amateurs and free of professional restraints. Also worth noting is that the boundaries between professional and amateur historians, academic history and the “public history domain,” are blurred on both sides. Pseudo-scholars (with academic credentials) from the “guild” represent it before the broader public, while internal mechanisms of selection and stimulation of good scholarship function poorly. At the same time, a certain reconfiguration of the “historical field” occurred, and informal circles and networks of like-minded scholars emerged across the established institutions and official authorities (as well as across disciplines). These groups pursue more innovative research and are better connected with the international historical community.

After the review of the truth-and-objectivity issues in Bulgarian historiography, a general appraisal and some reflections on future prospects are in

⁵³ Nikolai Poppetrov, “Istoricheskata nauka i obshtestvoto,” 270–272.

order. This can hardly be done without a certain presumptuousness vis-à-vis domestic scholars (to whom the original, Bulgarian-language edition of this book was addressed) while at the same time embarking on a risky methodological terrain beyond my immediate scope. To begin with, positivism in its “classical” form, as well as the faith in “objective” and unitary truth that goes with it, can hardly be sustained in the future, especially if Bulgarian historical scholarship opens up to the international environment. The influence of the inevitable point of view on historical scholarship, with all relativistic consequences for the “objectivity” and “truth,” has to be explicitly recognized. In fact, it was actually practiced in the following manner: while some disguised the communist standpoint as objective truth (i.e., corresponding to the state of affairs), others objected from another hidden point of view (the national one in particular) in the name of “objectivity,” too. Points of view or perspectives are not only the national and the usual political designations (left and right, conservative and revolutionary, etc.), but also “center”/“periphery” (however specified), the women’s perspective, the racial or minority view, and others. In addition, there is the question of voice—who speaks in the text. As pointed out by Peter Burke: “However hard we struggle to avoid the prejudices associated with color, creed, class or gender, we cannot avoid looking at the past from a particular point of view. Cultural relativism obviously applies as much to historical writing itself as to its so-called objects. Our minds do not reflect reality directly. We perceive the world only through a network of conventions, schemata and stereotypes, a network which varies from one culture to another. [...] We have moved from the ideal of the Voice of History to that of heteroglossia, defined as varied and opposing voices.”⁵⁴ It is another question whether in writing history, one can keep the viewpoints-voices on equal terms (as required by radical multiculturalism) or whether the authority of the historian and his “point of view” inevitably prevail and impose themselves.⁵⁵

With the arrival of pluralism and democracy in Bulgaria, and after the strongly politicized initial post-communist years, historical scholarship was freed to follow its own paths. It does not have to fulfill ideological tasks to

⁵⁴ Peter Burke, “Overture: The New History; Its Past and its Future,” in *New Perspectives on Historical Writing*, ed. Peter Burke (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2001; first published 1991), 6.

⁵⁵ See Robert Berkhofer, “A Point of View on Viewpoints in Historical Practice,” in *A New Philosophy of History*, ed. Frank Ankersmit and Hans Kellner (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 174–191. Berkhofer reveals the dilemmas resulting from the multiculturalist insistence of including various viewpoints and voices in the text.

legitimate the political regime, and even the state's general expectations and the partly self-appointed task of forming a national consciousness and national identity have been weakened by the state's (at least official) liberalism and membership in the European Union. This allows for a pluralism of points of view and interpretations, even though the traditional national standpoint remains dominant, as expressed by a foreign historian of Bulgaria and the region, who speaks of a "continuity in change."⁵⁶ To what extent the various viewpoints and voices will succeed in Bulgarian historiography, and how radical their assertion will be against the national(ist) "mainstream," remains to be seen. The weakened grip of traditional historical institutions on individual scholars, as well as international opportunities (fellowships, teaching and publishing abroad, external funding), encourage trends in this direction, and the initial results can already be seen.

What follows from the recognition of the influence of point of view upon historical knowledge? I think what follows is not an extreme and absolute "relativism"⁵⁷ in the sense that "anything goes" (and I am not an advocate of such), but rather the acknowledgment of the legitimacy of various (in practice, not that many) interpretations of one and the same phenomenon according to the position (political or other) of the author. We can call this relationism if we want—that is, the validity of the interpretation in relation to the position—of course, provided that it is well grounded empirically and well argued. One should be able to live with pluralism in historical scholarship as one does in politics.

Instead of assessing the inevitable viewpoint negatively, as a threat to the "objectivity" of historical knowledge, we can see it as a positive cognitive potential, first, as a condition of knowledge in general (knowledge is not possible without assumptions) and of social knowledge in particular (with its value assumptions). Going further, we can imagine the multiplication and varying of the viewpoints and the juxtaposition of various interpretations (and pitting one against the other) as a condition for scholarly distancing from the object of research in order to view its various aspects and as a kind of "neutralization" (of each individual interpretation).⁵⁸ If we wish we may call this "objectivity" in the sense of "objecti-

⁵⁶ Wolfgang Höpken, "'Kontinuität im Wandel': Historiographie in Bulgarien seit der Wende," *Österreichische Osthefte* 44, no. 1–2, (2002): 487–498, esp. 496–498.

⁵⁷ In fact, relativism is bad only given certain epistemological presuppositions of truth and objectivity connected with the positivist paradigm. From other premises it is normal or does not present a problem.

⁵⁸ In this sense Donald R. Kelly, *Frontiers of History: Historical Inquiry in the Twentieth Century* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2006), 214.

fyng” the “object” of study, although this is not a very apt term. Distancing, (mutual) neutralization, or making viewpoints and assumptions explicit seem more appropriate.

The strong influence of the present moment in making sense of the past (presentism) should be recognized as well. The interests and the agendas of the present determine to a large degree the vision and even the constitution of the past (this is a dividing line between German historicism and the French “*Annales*” school).⁵⁹ Historical knowledge, like every other human endeavor, remains connected (if not bound) with the era of its production and with the interests and values that motivated it. The impact of the present moment upon historical knowledge, reinforced by the direct interference (or control) of the political authorities, was clearly demonstrated in the previous essays. From the militant class-party approach of Stalinism through its relaxation (“liberalization”) to the turn toward nationalism, the moment left an unmistakable mark upon Bulgarian historiography. An ideological (totalitarian) regime such as communism shows that even great remoteness in time is not a guarantee of “objectivity” or neutrality of scholarship (a belief dearly held by classical historicism): a past as distant as the early Bulgarian Middle Ages did not remain untouched by the “friendship” and “brotherhood” with the Soviet Union, while the Ottoman period was reshaped in accordance with the needs of the “regenerative process.”⁶⁰

The curious thing is that Bulgarian historians tried hard not to recognize the influence of the present during the regime, where it was most pronounced. The explanation is, perhaps, that precisely because they were so aware of this influence, they put forward an ideal of scholarship that would not succumb to external influences. For that reason, even before 1989 but particularly afterwards, historians warned against compromising scholarship by bending to political pressure or working on commission (e.g., to “prove” that the Turks in Bulgaria were Bulgarians coerced into converting to Islam). On the other hand, this prevented them from seeing the deeper (subconscious) influence of the present upon historical scholarship, because they had in mind these rougher forms.

⁵⁹ François Hartog, *Regimes d'historicité* (Editions du Seuil, 2003).

⁶⁰ Vesela Chichovska, “V totalitarnite obshtestva.”

Under the communist regime, with its obligatory ideology, the issue of the relations between historical scholarship and ideology was of crucial importance. The militant Marxist philosophers postulated a difference between “bourgeois” social science as a distorted ideological image of reality and Marxist scholarship as truthful and objective “scientific” knowledge. But the historians preferred to stay away from such debates and espoused a positivist creed of their scholarship as different from, and opposed to, ideology. However, the sharp separation between historical “science” (and social science in general) and politics, historical knowledge and ideology, so appealing in fighting the “falsification of truth” by a totalitarian regime, is quite problematic—in fact, untenable—in pluralist democratic conditions. Obviously historical (and social) knowledge is not “ideology” in the sense of a direct legitimation of political power and social-class interests (though it can be forced into this as well), but it contains an ineradicable value element. No matter how hard we try to avoid biases and “neutralize” our attitude, the end product contains value judgments and implies ideals.

Departing from neo-Kantian positions, Max Weber acknowledged the fundamental significance of values in the social sciences but still believed in the possibility of restricting the value element to the initial formation of the object of knowledge and isolating it from the process of research and its outcome. In his value-free social science the “objectivity” of the outcome (its validity for everybody) is guaranteed by the rigor of the methodology and the requirements of scholarly ethics. He then indicates a variety of means, techniques, and strategies for achieving “objectivity”: keeping strictly to the facts, distancing oneself from the object of research and looking at it from various standpoints, control over the outcome through the approved scholarly methods, ethical restraint from biases and acknowledgement of facts that are inconvenient to one’s own standpoint, and the practice of self-reflection on one’s own (value) attitudes and assumptions.⁶¹

The question is how to understand Weber’s too pointed “value-free” (or “value-neutral”) social science, his insistence on separating the analysis of facts from value judgments. According to some interpreters, as was common in his era, he was not entirely aware of the deep penetration of social knowledge by values and ideals. In Karl Löwith’s quite different interpretation, for Weber “freedom from values” did not mean restraint

⁶¹ On Max Weber’s views on this issue, see Roumen Daskalov, “Kontseptsiyata na Max Weber za istoricheskoto poznanie” (Max Weber’s concept of historical knowledge), *Istoriicheski pregled* 45, no. 2 (1989): 58–73.

from judgments (assessments) and some “pure scientificity.” On the contrary, it freed science for a self-conscious, resolute, and consistent judgment of its own and thus for taking account of precisely the extra-scientific standards of the scholarly judgment (assessment).⁶² What it amounts to in the end is that the historian should not be deceived and should not deceive the readers about his standards in approaching and assessing things and making judgments. This is not a prohibition on the historian taking a position, but a clear consciousness of the position taken and the measuring standards applied.

According to another (somewhat cynical) concept of social knowledge, one should try to be a positivist in the sense of adhering to the well-known positivist requirements and standards, despite knowing that one cannot be a positivist in every way and *strictu sensu*.⁶³ In other words, one should play along by keeping to the traditional rules and procedures, although we know that this is a scholarly game (in the sense of Wittgenstein) and a writing convention.

It would probably be better to de-dramatize the ideology problem and accept with resignation that all social knowledge is a human endeavor, adapted to human needs and fulfilling certain functions, so that it cannot be entirely neutral and “objective.” Such an acknowledgement carries certain implications for the notion of “scientificity” and historical “truth,” namely that there is no point in looking for something absolute and not subject to time, outside society, and outside history. Alternatively, one can approach the issue from the ideology side rather than from science. Paul Ricoeur (in reference to Clifford Geertz) outlines a more positive understanding of ideology while at the same time weakening the dichotomy between knowledge (science) and ideology (politics) so characteristic of Karl Mannheim and of the Frankfurt school of neo-Marxism. According to him ideology should be thought of in relation not to knowledge, but to social reality, and it should be treated not as so negative (as “untruth”), but as something more positively and socially integrative. It is grafted on the basic human function of symbolizing the world to make orientation possible; the “distortions” are secondary and not the only possibility in the realm of the “imaginary.” What we call ideology concentrates itself mostly around political power and serves its legitimation (in contrast to

⁶² Karl Löwith, “Die Entzauberung der Welt durch Wissenschaft,” *Merkür* 18, no. 6 (1964): 501–519, p. 511.

⁶³ W.G. Runciman, *A Critique of Max Weber's Philosophy of Social Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), 8–10, 55–60.

“utopia” as the contestation of power), but without the social nexus and political integration, society is hardly possible.⁶⁴

The previous relativizations should not be taken, however, as a justification (or license) for a brazen and deliberate ideologization of historical knowledge, in which the issue is not a (legitimate) interpretation of facts in the light of one’s (inevitable) value judgments, but serving preconceived political tenets, for which the facts are adjusted and even fabricated. The communist regime’s efforts to control historical “truth” through direct and crude interference in historical scholarship should not be forgotten. The rigorous methodological requirements of positivist scholarship, its demands concerning the researcher’s ethics, and reliance on the internal critique in the scholarly community were suppressed and of little use in such a situation. It was in this context that fighting for the “truth” (i.e., different from the official one) became highly relevant and even vital and actually represented a fight for intellectual independence and professional autonomy. The best guarantee against the deliberate ideologization and politicization of historical knowledge and certainty that they will encounter criticism is provided by an environment of political democracy, which favors pluralism of viewpoints and interpretations. But then the problem of “truth” also loses its urgency and drama. In one simple sense the standard of truth preserves its validity, namely as a guiding idea of the research (a kind of “regulative idea”); the scholar sets to work in search for “the truth.” From the fact that knowledge is “perspectival,” it does not follow that one should strive toward falsehood.

One can turn one’s gaze—as Michel de Certeau does—away from the product of historiography and toward the conditions of its production and the practice of historiography.⁶⁵ This quite radical author, influenced by Marx, Freud, and Foucault, focuses on the site of production of historical knowledge, its proximity to political power (graphically manifest in the past, when “history” simply served the ruler); the institutions and the collective body (the “profession”) engaged in the production of knowledge; the scientific operations, analytical techniques, and procedures building the “discipline,” the ways of understanding, and the construction of the text as outcome. He develops radical (and effectively formulated) views on the

⁶⁴ Paul Ricoeur, *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia*, ed. and trans. George H. Taylor (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), especially the introductory lecture, 1–17.

⁶⁵ Michel de Certeau, *The Writing of History*, trans. Tom Conley (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988) (first published as *L’écriture de l’histoire*, Editions Gallimard, 1975), esp. 6–11, 20–21, 34, 44–46, 56–70.

relation of historiography with the present, not only as a standpoint from which to observe the past, but also as a positioning of the historian within the profession in present-day society (the writing of history as “social practice”), and dependence of the topics on what is allowed or prohibited by the institution, as well as the necessity of a dual orientation of historical knowledge—to render past meanings, but to be also intelligible to contemporaries. From this point of view, the “ideology” (or implicit “philosophy”) of historiography and its relation with the political are simply unavoidable.

Regarding the Bulgarian institutions for the production of historical knowledge (universities, institutes of history of the Academy of Sciences, museums), one should note the sharp increase in their significance under socialism, which entrusted historical knowledge with ideological functions in legitimating the regime and educational functions in raising socialist people and recreating national identity and loyalty to the state. On the one hand, this strongly ideologized the knowledge of the past. On the other hand, the proximity to power and the ideological-educational functions raised the importance and the prestige of the historical profession in society (above economics and to the same level as law) and led to its unprecedented expansion (with institutes, positions, and resources). In a certain sense, and notwithstanding the absence of intellectual freedom, state socialism was a golden age for the historical profession, and the historian felt like an adviser to the ruler, an arbiter of past politics, and a judge of great historical personalities. After communism the movement was in the reverse direction: historical knowledge was released from ideological tasks. Along with this, its political significance and public prestige decreased, material support for it shrank, and the guild became socially isolated. The irony is that precisely at the moment the historians freed themselves from political tutelage, they lost their sense of self-importance, and the significance of the profession declined. But the past remains important for Bulgarian post-communist society as well, as shown by the previously mentioned forms of its public use and misuse. It remains to be seen whether the society will relate in other ways and modes to its past besides nationalist self-glorification (or victimization) and what the role of the professional historians will be in that respect.

Bulgarian historical scholarship did not witness a postmodern linguistic (or rhetorical) turn. No special attention was paid to the use of language and the way of telling the story (the narrative) in historical writings; hence

the questioning (“crisis”) of representation and the radical relativizations of “truth,” “objectivity,” and “scientificity” were missed.⁶⁶ One of the most interesting and radical treatments of the specificity of the historical discourse comes from the semiotician Roland Barthes. Starting with an analysis of the way in which the historian marks his interference in the text, Barthes notes the general tendency of historians to repress any reference to themselves and thus to create a “referential illusion” of objectivity. The objectivist historical discourse is assertive and ascertaining in its mode, pointing to apparently very certain things, and it appears that nobody takes personal responsibility for the statements. The historical discourse pretends to work with only two terms—signifier (*signifiant*) and referent—by concealing the signified (*signifié*, namely, the historian’s narrative) behind the referent (“of what really happened”). The elimination of the signified in the “objective” historical discourse and its direct confrontation with the “reality” creates a “reality effect”; it incessantly claims to reach reality. By refusing to accept the reality as signified and thus to separate the referent from the statement about it, historical discourse constitutes itself as a genre, which sees in referring to the “pure” facts the best proof of (the existence of) these facts. Thus paradoxically, narrative structure (developed first in myths and epics) now becomes simultaneously a sign and a proof of reality.

Barthes differentiates between an entirely non-signifying history (unstructured series of entries—chronologies and chronicles) and the usual histories, which signify and produce meaning, whether manifest and discrete or deeper and holistic. According to him, the task of the historian is not so much to enumerate facts as to connect signifiers (*signifiants*) and thus to invest meanings, filling up the “emptiness of the pure series.” The production of a signifying (meaningful) narrative at the same time implicates the historian in ideology (and in the imaginary in general).⁶⁷

The “history of historiography” practiced here generally has a different status from historiography itself and puts itself in a “meta”-position (of “meta-discourse”). It relates not to historical reality (which is “suspended”), but to the historiographical rendering of it. Its referent is the

⁶⁶ On the “linguistic turn,” see Richard Vann, “Turning Linguistic: History and Theory and History and Theory, 1960–1975,” in *A New Philosophy of History*, eds. Frank Ankersmit and Hans Kellner (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 40–69.

⁶⁷ Roland Barthes, “Le discours de l’histoire,” *Social Science Information* 6, no. 4 (1967): 65–75. A presentation of Barthes’s ideas in Richard Vann, “Turning Linguistic,” 56–59.

worded (written) historiographical discourse, and its relation to historical “reality” is thus mediated. The attention is focused on the signified (the contents, the expression) of the historical discourse—the historical narrative of various historians. Hence on a very fundamental level the “history of historiography” (in contrast to historiography itself, with its “reality effect”) produces an “unreality effect” or the appearance of fiction, and thus relativizes the belief in “objective” historical knowledge and historical “truth.” Instead of saying that things were this or that way, it says: according to this or that author, things were this or that way. The relativizing effect is enhanced by the confrontation between various interpretations of the “same” historical phenomena. Still, the history of historiography practiced here takes a more or less definite attitude to the historical phenomena and suggests its own interpretations, though indirectly. In this sense, it belongs to historiography itself, adding its voice to the rest.

In a postmodern spirit one can see in the historical scholarship a “style” of writing and a “narrative” with its own conventions. One may then stress the scientific (“disciplinary” and “disciplined”) character of this style and discourse: facts and arguments, citations, references to authoritative scholars, footnotes, and so on. Or one may ascribe it, as Hayden White does, to the literary genres, assimilating the historical works (at least the great historical works) to a branch of literature, hence the “poetics of history.” It is not possible to go into the sophisticated ideas of this prominent representative of “rhetorical relativism,” except to evoke them in the most general outline. One central idea is that the historian prefigures the historical field according to the literary tropes of metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, or irony (in a sort of “tropological strategy”). Every trope exhibits “elective affinities” with one of four ways of emplotment (romance, comedy, tragedy, and satire), four modes of explanation (formistic, organistic, mechanistic, and contextualist), and four ideologies (anarchism, conservatism, radicalism, and liberalism). The particular historiographical style is a combination of these elements. Hayden White does not deny that the historian deals with events that actually happened in space and time, while authors of fiction are constrained only by their imagination. But according to him the differences between a historical and a literary work are not as interesting and important as the similarities. Furthermore, the similarities are not only in the form (construction of the text according to the requirements of coherence, consistency, etc.), but in the goals, which are primarily aesthetic and moral: in the case of history not so much to ascertain that

something has happened, but what this means for a certain group or the society in their understanding of their present-day tasks and their vision of the future.⁶⁸

Of course, if historiography is likened to literature, the question of “truth” and “objectivity” (or the importance of the historical evidence) does not arise or is of secondary significance. This is because the narrative—every narrative—already produces explanations and persuades with its formal-structural and linguistic features: it implies, sends ideological messages, and implements certain “politics.” History is not a science, and every historical description of reality contains an irreducible ideological (and deeper ethical) component; the very act of making sense of the past carries with it ideological implications in the attempt to understand the present, hence whether it should be maintained or changed.⁶⁹

Without probing the depths of the “historical discourse,” the previous essays addressed some linguistic phenomena and rhetorical effects, such as the hard evaluative (Stalinist) vocabulary and phraseology with its slogan-like simplifying formulations. Key terms, which contain (and conceal) fundamental value judgments and positions, were problematized, such as “Russophobia/Russophilia,” “worker-peasant alliance,” “unity of action,” “people’s rule,” “antifascism,” “all-people’s uprising,” “second liberation,” “people’s democracy,” “socialist revolution,” and “advanced socialism.” These are terms-interpretations, in which the name itself contains an attitude toward reality. Also analyzed were rhetorical constructs such as “main” and “basic” contradictions and the “growing” of the struggle for democracy into a struggle for socialism. The post-communist “re-writing of history” itself began as a symbolic struggle of renaming, using opposite terms (such as “revolution/coup d’état,” “liberation/occupation,” and “socialism/totalitarianism”). Far from being transparent, the language in historiography conveys messages, makes insinuations, and implies values and attitudes. To persuade, it uses rhetorical means such as grading statements in strength (in order to make a weaker one acceptable); taking the opponent’s position to absurd extremes (in order to refute it); and implying causality, similarity, or another type of relation between empirically unrelated phenomena through linguistic means, such as conjunctions or mere proximity in text. The grammatical tense also carries implica-

⁶⁸ Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973), 1–42. See also the treatment of this author in Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream*, 599–603.

⁶⁹ Hayden White, *Metahistory*, 21–29.

tions; for instance, there is a special tense (in Bulgarian) that posits the writer as an eyewitness, in contrast with more distanced and neutral tenses. The previous essays contain various examples of “manipulation” through language (also used for good purposes, for instance, to diverge from the official views), though, to avoid personal offense, I did not go too far in this direction.

Regardless of whether one subscribes to the above notions of history (and how far one is prepared to go in this direction), the aspects and challenges connected with the linguistic and narrative nature of historiography cannot be ignored and should be taken most seriously. Our era is characterized by a lack of consensus on the questions of historical knowledge or scholarship. In the end every historian is free to choose among the available concepts (which presupposes some knowledge of them). Even positivism—so much under attack by the post-modernists, whose naïve and over-optimistic version is “dated”—has some newer working formulations. While rejecting the arrogance of the only true ideology that guarantees truthful historical knowledge and perhaps looking back with nostalgia to the reassuring certainties of classical positivism, Bulgarian historical scholarship must face the challenges of perspectivism (of various viewpoints and “voices”) and of the still more radical linguistic and literary approaches to historical works and draw the inferences for “objectivity” and “truth.”

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Transliteration

а – a	р – r
б – b	с – s
в – v	т – t
г – g	у – u
д – d	ф – f
е – e	х – kh (but “h” at the beginning of the word)
ж – zh (<u>Z</u> hechev as in “v <u>i</u> sion”)	ц – ts (<u>T</u> sonev as in “ <u>t</u> sar”)
з – z	ч – ch
и – i	ш – sh
й – i	щ – sht
к – k	ъ – ŭ (Dimit <u>ŭ</u> r as in “m <u>o</u> ney”)
л – l	ь – y when in conjunction with “o”
м – m	ю – yu (<u>Y</u> uri as in “ <u>U</u> nion”)
н – n	я – ya (Ili <u>y</u> a as in “ <u>y</u> ard”)
о – o	
п – p	

The Russian letter “ы” is transliterated as “y”; the Russian letter “ь” is rendered as ‘.

I retained the spelling of well-known geographical names (such as Sofia, pronounced “Sofiya”) and the accepted spellings of Serb, Croat, Czech, Polish, and other names and words.

The book is comprised of the four major debates on modern Bulgarian history from Independence in 1878 to the fall of communism in 1989. The debates are on the Bulgarian–Russian/Soviet relations, on the relations between Agrarians and Communists, on Bulgarian Fascism, and on Communism. They are associated with the rule (regimes) of key political personalities in Bulgarian history: Stambolov (1887–1894), Stamboliiski (1919–1923), Tsar Boris III (1918–1943), and the communist leaders Georgi Dimitrov and Todor Zhivkov (1956–1989). The debates are traced through their various articulations and dramatic turns from their beginnings to the present day.

This intelligent, erudite and methodologically rigorous analysis of Bulgarian historiography from the 19th century to the present is one of the few genuinely modern historiographical syntheses in the East European field. It thus contributes significantly to the gradual de-provincialization of the discipline.”

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